

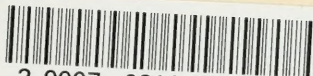
Confessions  
*of a*  
Social Secretary

Corinne Lowe




THE LIBRARY OF  
**YORK**  
UNIVERSITY

E. T. W.



3 9007 0302 8085 3

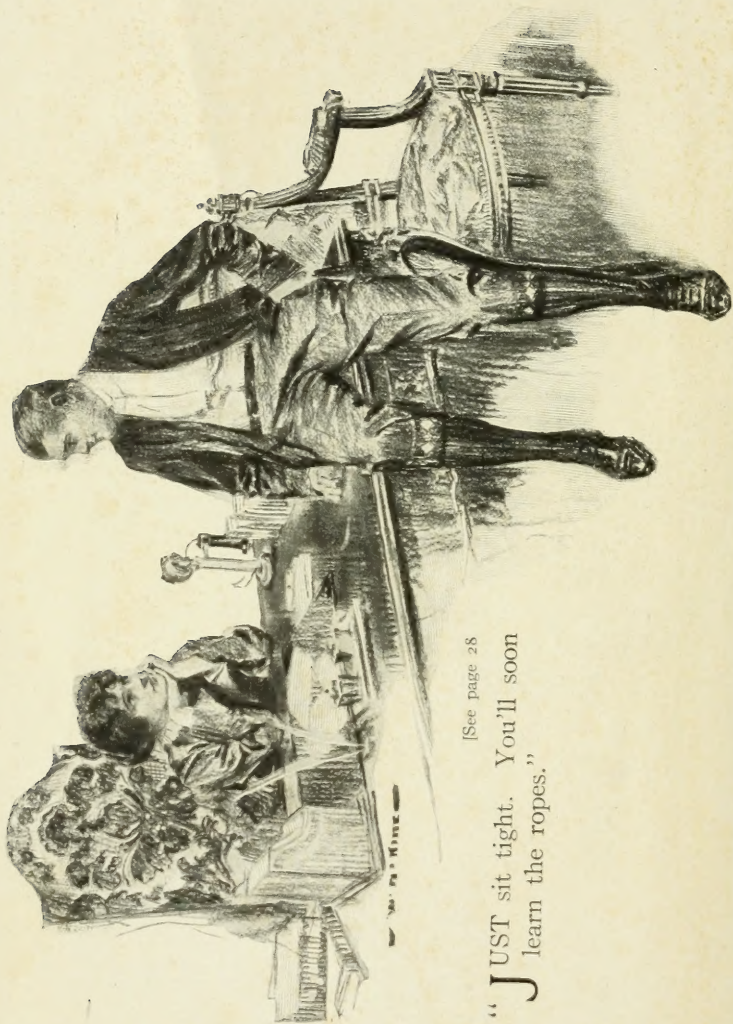
60



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2009 with funding from  
Ontario Council of University Libraries







[See page 28

“JUST sit tight. You’ll soon  
learn the ropes.”

# CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

BY  
CORINNE LOWE



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

PS  
3523  
087  
C6

CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Copyright, 1916, by Harper & Brothers

Printed in the United States of America

Published February, 1917

[Published serially under the title *This is the Life.*]

A-R



# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE GREAT MRS. RHINEBECK CUTTLE—THE WOMAN WHO RULED NEW YORK SOCIETY THROUGH HER ORIGINALITY, VITALITY, AND THE MIGHT OF HER PERSONALITY . . . . .	1
II.	NEW YORK'S SPECTACULAR SET—TOMMY OGLE, WHOSE GIFT FOR AMUSING PEOPLE BROUGHT HIM FAME—JULES CAMBARTIN, "BORN A BACHELOR AND SET ASIDE TO COOL . . . .	17
III.	LIFE AT THE TORRENTS—THE GRIM ENCHANTMENT OF WEEKLY HOUSE PARTIES—COSTLY CALAMITIES FOR THE HOSTESS—SOCIAL LIONS IN CAPTIVITY—TEA-TABLE CONVERSATIONS . . . .	34
IV.	PARRINS, THE BUTLER, AND HIS EXHAUSTING TASKS—THE SOLITARY EARLY BIRD—IDIOSYNCRASIES OF GUESTS—THE WOMAN WHO BROUGHT HER OWN BED-LINEN . . . . .	47
V.	THE NEW YORK SEASON—THREE DINNERS AT \$1,000 EACH—SACRED ELEMENTS OF THE FIRST DINNER—MRS. FALCONVAUX, SOCIAL ENTERTAINER—AVOIDING PITFALLS . . . . .	55
VI.	WHAT IS A SERVICE?—PARRINS' IDEA OF A MISSPENT LIFE—THE CARE-FREE ATTITUDE OF THE RICH TOWARD THEIR DEBTS—THE SET WHERE BILLS SINK WITHOUT A BUBBLE . . . . .	67
VII.	THE MYSTERIOUS BLUE-EYED GUEST—A DINNER OF TWELVE COURSES IN FIFTY MINUTES—THE ECSTATIC MOMENT WHEN THE ORCHESTRA STRIKES UP "HOME, SWEET HOME" . . .	81

# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
VIII.	THE USEFUL FILLERS-IN—SOCIETY LUNCHEONS DESIGNED FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF WOMEN— UBIQUITOUS "SOCIAL CLIMBERS"—BUYING ONE'S WAY INTO THE SMART SET. . . . .	97
IX	SIZING UP GUESTS BELOW-STAIRS—A DOLLAR FOR A COCKTAIL—NINETEEN SERVANTS ON A MONTHLY PAY-ROLL OF \$1,500—THE BUTLER'S ADHESIVE DRESS-SUIT . . . . .	107
X.	HOUSECLEANING AT THE RHINEBECK CUTTLES'— A DAILY ACCOMPLISHMENT IN AN IMMACULATE HOUSEHOLD—THE WORK OF INVISIBLE MARY— UNIFORMS OF CHAMBERMAIDS . . . . .	122
XI.	THE PERTURBED LIFE OF THE CHEF IN HIS AUGUST DOMAIN—TWELVE HUNDRED POUNDS OF ICE EACH DAY—THE LILIES THAT LIVED—A HUNDRED-CENTIMETER HOUSEKEEPER . . . . .	134
XII.	THE SERVANTS' MEALS—ETIQUETTE BELOW-STAIRS —SUBMARINE SNOBBERY—THE PANGS OF CORNEB BEEF—HOT CAKES OF ICE—WHY ONE GUEST'S CLOTHES WERE NOT PRESSED . . . . .	144
XIII.	INNER SECRETS OF NEWPORT—THE AWFUL POWER OF "OLD SAM"—VERANDA BATHING—\$1,400 A MONTH TO THE BUTCHER—LIMPING THROUGH A SEASON ON \$8,000 A MONTH . . . . .	158
XIV.	COMBATS OVER VISITING NOBLEMEN—THE STIRRING INCIDENT OF PRINCE GUSTAVUS OF SWEDEN— A SHY AND SLEEPY PRINCE—THROWING IN A FEW DEMOCRATIC PLEASURES . . . . .	170
XV.	THE STOLEN GRAND DUKE—TOMMY OGLE TO THE RESCUE—UNDULATING UNDINE SPOILS A PARTY —HOW MRS. HARKINSON BUZZER FELL FROM A NEWPORT PEAK . . . . .	182
XVI.	DODGING THE INELIGIBLES—THE GREAT LEAGUE FOR PROTECTING DAUGHTERS FROM NEEDY YOUNG MEN—THE BREAD-LINE OF NEWPORT —ONE "VON" WHO ENTERTAINED . . . . .	195

# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
XVII.	MRS. CUTTLE'S GREAT WATTEAU BALL—A \$12,000 EVENING WITH MARIE ANTOINETTE—KNEES SUDDENLY PUBLISHED TO THE WORLD—VER- ONICA GREY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND . . . . .	208
XVIII.	MRS. CUTTLE DECIDES TO HAVE A FEW TREES— THE VISCOUNT OF SHEEPSKIN SUDDENLY LEAVES NEWPORT—VERONICA GREY MAKES AN IMPORTANT DECISION . . . . .	219
XIX.	WHEN THE SOCIAL TIRES SKIDDED—OUTDOING ONE'S RIVALS—THE MIKADO DINNER PRE- CEDING THE TRAYMORE BALL—MODEST RE- QUESTS FROM THE READING PUBLIC . . . . .	230
XX.	WASHINGTON DURING THE SEASON—THE GUEST WHO THOUGHT A DINNER WAS SOMETHING ONE ATE—THE END OF SOCIAL DESIRE— MEETING "MOTHER'S FRIEND". . . . .	240
XXI.	"GROWING OLD" IN SOCIETY—THE TIME WHEN EVEN "THE GADFLY" OMITS ITS USUAL STING —GRADUAL DIMMING OF A SOCIAL LIGHT— THE END OF THE GREAT GAME. . . . .	252





**CONFESSIONS OF A  
SOCIAL SECRETARY**



# CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

## I

THE GREAT MRS. RHINEBECK CUTTLE—THE  
WOMAN WHO RULED NEW YORK SOCIETY  
THROUGH HER ORIGINALITY, VITALITY, AND  
THE MIGHT OF HER PERSONALITY.

“**W**ELL, I’m in a great hurry! Where is  
she?”

Through the open doorway the sound of the  
loud, impatient voice crashed over me like a  
big wave. Literally I was picked up from my  
chair and borne off by this voice. In another  
moment I stood in the presence of Mrs. Rhine-  
beck Cuttle.

Two of us went that morning to the Young  
Women’s Christian Association to apply for  
the position of social secretary to the great New

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

York society leader. The other woman had gone first, and to this day she is pitifully enshrined in my memory as a life-size figure of the Person Who is Not Wanted. She was fat and ungraceful; she was roofed in red bangs; and she carried an immense hand-bag. As I sat there in the little darkened anteroom the sound of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's loud voice plainly registered the impression that had been made upon her.

"Did you wish to see me?"

A bewildered little monosyllable had ensued; and then I heard Mrs. Cuttle cleaving through the silence.

"Well, I'm in a great hurry this morning. I'm just on my way to another appointment. I'm afraid we shall have to put off our interview till some other time."

The other woman had retreated awkwardly, and as she came out I caught the hurt look in her eyes. At the same time I could hear Mrs. Dearborn, the secretary of the Young Women's Christian Association, who had arranged this meeting for me, trying to prevail upon Mrs. Cuttle to see me. At first she had flatly refused to do so. Afterward had come the peremptory summons that took me into her presence.



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

At the moment when I entered the room she was turning impatiently on her chair. Her arms rested on the back, and for an instant she did not say a word. Then all at once she broke into a loud laugh.

"Did you see that awful person they just sent me?" she cried.

No word of greeting! No preamble! That was Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's way. She had no more use for formal Good-mornings and How-do-you-do's? than the wave to which I have compared her voice. She simply took you up, drenched you, and overcame you by the might of her personality.

"Yes," replied I with a tenth carbon copy of a laugh; "I did. She was—rather funny."

All the time I was watching her, and my scrutiny was all the more intense because so trembling. To-day, after fourteen years of service as her social secretary, how can I sum up the feeling with which she left me? Well, it is easy to overrate first impressions. Holding up to an occasion the torch of years of accumulated memories, we say: "I felt from the first moment I saw him this man's power or that man's underlying weakness." Here in this case the temptation may be discounted. I can

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

honestly say that from the moment when I first beheld the great society leader I felt in her that restless vitality which lifted her above her associates.

Last summer, when I went up to Newport while Mrs. Cuttle was ill, Mrs. Pendenning Carter came up to me and cried: "Oh, Mrs. Pemberton, it isn't the same place without her!" How well I understand that! Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle had the genius for splendor possessed by only a few of the world's wealthy. Comparatively poor among her class—a class that reckoned its wealth by the ten millions—her entertainments yet stood to both America and Europe as the climax of millionaire magnificence. She was to Newport and New York almost what Louis Quatorze was to Versailles. Like the great "King of the Bees," she entertained and dictated, she snubbed and offended; and, now that she was unable to lead it, the circle in which she moved hung like a vine without its trellis.

All this was sensed by me as she turned impatiently on her chair and looked round at me. At this time Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle was in her forties. Her rather square, powerful figure was clad in mourning; and above the black I saw,

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

at first, only her eyes—bold, dark eyes, which one of her friends once described as being able to see a cobweb in the fog. They glowed under rather drooping lids, darkened now, as always, to an almost purple tint, and above them were set rather heavy eyebrows. For the rest her face was rather pale, her nose straight, and her mouth harshly imperious.

But now Mrs. Cuttle was rising from her chair. She never, I found out afterward, stayed more than a moment in dock.

“I do want a social secretary,” said she; “but I’m in such a great hurry now. Can you come to my house this afternoon at six? Please be prompt, though, for I’m going out to dinner.”

“Oh,” said I, “I’m always on time.”

“Are you?” she fairly puffed. If you patted an engine on the head it would give just the same expression of gratification. “Oh, I like that! I’m always on time myself. Come to me this afternoon, then. Good-by.”

When she had gone Mrs. Dearborn, the secretary of the Young Women’s Christian Association, came rushing up to me.

“You’re as good as taken!” she cried, excitedly. “Mrs. Cuttle has just happened to take a fancy to you. She’s like that, you know.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

She always feels from the first moment whether she is going to like a person or not." Then, lowering her tone: "She's a terror—few people can get along with her. But you go; and, even if you can stand it for only a week, it will mean a great deal to you to be able to say you have been with Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle."

"But," cried I, "how in the world am I going to do it? I've had no experience in this line. What shall I do? How shall I act?"

To tell the truth, I was stunned at the thought of what I had undertaken. Two months before I had come up to New York from the leisurely city where I was born and bred. I had paid five dollars as a registration fee at the Bureau of Social Employment, and during the months of August and September had been introduced to a number of prominent society women, each and all of whom had refused me because of my lack of experience. I knew nothing of the starry names that dot the Social Register. My association with servants was confined to the dusky butler and cook who had brought me up. Was it any wonder that I felt like a grub trying to wing myself into the most spectacular household in New York society?



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

That afternoon, however, I sought the town house of the Cuttles. It was already quite dark, and for a long time I tottered up and down the quiet block. When finally I did get the courage to ring the bell I was escorted at once to the bedroom of Mrs. Cuttle. She was attired now in a pink negligée, and the make-up still hung over those dark eyes like the cloud of a train flung against the darkness of night.

"Well," said she, "can you come to me to-morrow?"

I seated myself on a chair that might have been put in a cabinet and placed my feet on a rug that might have covered a Pekingese; and I voiced my own doubts of my ability.

"I have had absolutely no experience," began I. "You will have to be patient with me."

"Oh, I can't be patient—I have no patience," replied Mrs. Cuttle. "But I like your looks—I think we'd get along together. Can you come to-morrow?"

"But I warn you," repeated I, desperately; "I have had no experience."

"Will you come to-morrow?" she insisted, impatiently. "Yes; of course you will. I'll pay you a hundred a month to start with, and after that we'll see."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

I looked at her helplessly.

"I'm really in a great hurry," snorted she.

I swallowed hard. "Very well, then," said I; "I'll come."

That night I received a wire from Mrs. Cuttle: "Engage and bring along with you butler, chef, parlor-maid, and two footmen." And I realized that already the fringe of her mantle was touching me.

"How shall I do it?" asked I of Mrs. Dearborn when, after a sleepless night, I presented my haggard face at the Young Women's Christian Association early the next morning. "I'm scared of my life to meet a butler. What shall I ask him?"

She took an hour to explain to me the questions which must be asked of every high-bred servant, and after that called up the Pinkham Employment Agency and asked them to send me down applicants for the five unfilled positions.

"The Pinkham is the best in the city," explained she. "They know the servants in the best houses of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore. They can give you records of all of them, and you'll have to make their acquaintance at once."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

A few hours afterward I was sitting in the reception-room face to face with a noted English butler.

“Do you understand all the duties of a butler?” asked I, gazing on that smooth expanse of British cheek set out with its beds of whisker.

My tone was grand, but inside I felt very much like an oyster picking out the man who shall eat him. I was quaking for fear he would retort with, “Do you understand the duties of a social secretary?”

Perhaps, however, even an English butler may sometimes be deceived. At any rate, his tone was clipped to an immense respect. “Perfectly,” said he.

“Do you know all about serving the wine?” continued I, slavishly echoing Mrs. Dearborn’s suggestion.

“Quite so,” replied he, bending his head.

“I am told you can give excellent references from English houses,” said I.

“Indeed, yes, madam. For ten years I was with Lord Wearyton, of Gaunt House. Then, when he died, I went with Mr. Dundee-Parnell, at Brightham Manor.”

“Very good,” replied I.

And now my wave of inquiry reared to its

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

crest. "Be sure," Mrs. Dearborn had insisted, "to ask him if he knows how to make a good claret cup. It is so awfully important."

I put the question, and I think I put it well. I don't believe he ever suspected for one moment that I had never tasted this beverage.

"My receipt came from Gaunt House," replied he, with dignity. "It has been in the family for generations. I don't think madam will have any cause to complain."

"Very well, then," said I; "it is settled. You may engage two footmen and come down to The Torrents on the one-o'clock train to-morrow."

After this I interviewed the chef and the parlor-maid; and when I had finished Mrs. Dearborn applauded me.

"Fine!" said she. "You are a credit to any correspondence course in engaging servants."

That afternoon I took the train for The Torrents, Mrs. Cuttle's country place on the Hudson. It was a lovely October day, and the victoria that met me at the station swung me through several miles of the most beautiful countryside. More than a mile of this led through a private road lined with great trees. Beeches and oaks waved their scarlet manes

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

overhead, and here and there a somber evergreen was winged with the yellow of some adjacent sapling. That intense smoky stillness of October lapped me round; the carriage glided along as noiselessly as a gondola; the men on the box, in their tan coats, addressed not one word to each other; and the only sound was that regular creamy beat of the horses' hoofs. I was as one in a trance. Like Mr. Browning's lover, I wished to ride—forever ride. And I put steadfastly away from me the terrifying thought of the responsibilities to which the dreamlike drive was drawing me.

At last, however, The Torrents was at hand. I saw before me a long, low house, surrounded by spotless verandas. The victoria glided now through rows of chrysanthemums and scarlet sage, and as we reached the house I could see from the hill on which it stood gleams of the Hudson as it curved like a supple blade about the great cliffs.

One of the men on the box jumped down and rang the bell. The door swung open for me; and, with my knees trembling beneath me, I walked up the entrance steps between the files of bay-trees drawn up in front of the veranda, and trembled into a reception-hall, where, be-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

neath a glorious tapestry, there stood a table of Italian marble, glowing now with two vases of autumn flowers. On each side of the door, much more stonelike than the Renaissance table, stood a footman, each providing a six-foot trellis for his crimson-rambler uniform.

In time I became accustomed to these trappings; but at this, my first glimpse, I stared frankly as a child. Never before, except on the stage, and then looking down on their bangs, had I seen such ornaments as these two servitors. Their attire was claret-colored coat and knickerbockers, silk waistcoat, and white stockings terminating in pumps. Brass buttons trimmed both coat and waistcoat, and every one of these was inscribed with the Cuttle coat of arms.

I had noted this device on the victoria that brought me up, and during the fourteen years of my service in the household I got on very confidential terms with that crest. Everything in the house got up and gave a seat to it—stationery, carriages, draperies, table-linen, silver, place-cards, and uniforms. My only wonder, indeed, was that they did not work it on the butter-pats and the handle of the vacuum-cleaner.

One of the footmen led me into the great



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

living-room, that living-room which has been celebrated in one of our most famous American novels; which was the center stage for house-parties that have echoed from the Bosphorus to the Red Sea, and back again to Puget Sound. I shall say a word of it later on. Just at present my vision was filled by a small, dark woman who stepped from the center of the room to meet me. It was Miss Venaturra, the retiring secretary.

"Ah, Mrs. Pemberton," said she, "here you are in time for a little coaching. It really won't be hard here in the country. This is between seasons, you know, and your job doesn't really commence to grow up until they go to New York and to Newport."

The manner of a retiring social secretary is always just about as cordial as a ticket-agent's. Miss Venaturra was not different from the rest; but she sketched in my duties, took me over the house—albeit glumly—and at last showed me to my own sitting-room. Right here I may say that Mrs. Cuttle, as is the custom, provided me, in each of her three houses, with a suite consisting of sitting-room, bedroom, and bath. My meals were always served to me in my sitting-room by the parlor-maid, and here at eight

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

o'clock I sat down to my first dinner in the Cuttle household.

I sipped my wines silently; I tasted at birds and fish bathed in strange fonts of French dressing, and every now and then I gave an awed glance at my surroundings. The room, with its white woodwork and its hangings of golden damask, its long table covered with green leather and bronze writing accessories, and ranged by various books of reference—Social Registers of different cities, an Almanach de Gotha, an American and English Who's Who—was all so very silent and dreamlike that I expected every moment somebody would touch me on the shoulder and say: "Come, Miss Cinderella; your pumpkin coach is waiting outside."

Once, just after dinner, I got up and peeped into the long white closet that ranged one side of the room. Here there was more stationery than I had ever seen. Note-paper of all sizes, inscribed with the crest, was drawn up beside note-paper of all sizes engraved simply with the name of the country place. Pads and pencils and erasers were stowed away in the corners. My switchboard was all ready for the operator.

This sitting-room of mine adjoined the library,

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

and the library opened on the right from the great living-room. That night, as I passed through on my way to my bedroom, I made the acquaintance of my employer's husband. Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle was sitting by the table reading Washington Irving, and as I entered he rose courteously and held out his hand. He was at this time a man of past fifty, and you got a pleasant sense of a kindly, rather solid gaze and a big, powerful figure. He was, indeed, quite a good deal like a handsome, stoical old lion who crept just as far as possible from the beholders at his wife's social zoo.

As he stood there talking to me Mrs. Cuttle swept into the room. She was attired now in a very low-cut evening gown of sequins; and not only her cheeks were mottled red from the excitement of the evening, but also her neck. At her right side glittered a gigantic brooch. Through the open doorway was flung a jet of piano music—"The Prince of Pilsen" and "Robin Hood." Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle showed a look of dull discomfort at this sign of festivity, and turned longingly to his Washington Irving. Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle took my hand. It was the first time I had seen her since my arrival at The Torrents.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Come right along, Mrs. Pemberton," said she; "I want you to meet these people. I have a house party on just now and you'll have to look in."

I had, in fact, heard about this house party from Miss Venaturra.

"They're always having a house party here," she had said, with some distaste. "The chief amusement of rich people in the country is in getting so many people about them that they can forget it is the country."

I shrank back from Mrs. Cuttle's gesture. "Oh no," I stammered; "I really can't meet anybody—not to-night."

"Of course you can," retorted she. "Come along."

I had a vision of Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle's going back contentedly to his set—Wouter Van Twiller, Rip Van Winkle, and Ichabod Crane—at the same time that I went out to meet his wife's set.

## II

NEW YORK'S SPECTACULAR SET—TOMMY OGLE,  
WHOSE GIFT FOR AMUSING PEOPLE BROUGHT  
HIM FAME—JULES CAMBARTIN, "BORN A  
BACHELOR AND SET ASIDE TO COOL."

AS we entered the great living-room the dark Italian red of the velvet hangings waked into a glow from one big central chandelier and from groups of smaller lights at the sides. The fireplace at each end sputtered against the chill of the October evening. The heavy gold galloons and gold-embroidered crests of the wine-colored draperies weighted the room with a magnificence that reminded you of Middle-Age Venice; and a whole unbroken and uncurtained row of windows held a picture now of the evening Hudson that might have been some waterway of the queenly city lit by the torches of her lacelike palaces. A footman was moving about just as though he were on casters, and as he took the cordial-glasses his claret-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

colored uniform gave exactly the proper emphasis to the groups of men and women distributed in the room.

As we entered upon this scene Mrs. Cuttle called out to the young man who was playing the piano:

“Here, Tommy, stop that drumming! Here’s my new social secretary—the lady from the South I was telling you about. She’s read all about you down there in Maryland, and she wants to see what you are really like.”

The “Prince of Pilsen” ceased abruptly, and Tommy Ogle rose from his responsibilities behind the grand piano. I had read all about this young man. I was familiar with the fact that, a poor young man, he had come to a New York social success won through his gift for amusing people; and it was, therefore, with a great deal of curiosity that I inspected him as he came out from behind the piano.

“Well, Mrs. Pemberton, take a good look at me,” said he, in the high, falsetto voice that sharpened everything he said to an acute funniness.

He was a rather stout young man with merry blue eyes. There is a Tommy Ogle in every social circle in America; and, whether



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

you find him at a picnic on the banks of the Wabash or leading the Virginia reel at the firemen's ball in Zanesville, Ohio, or making the fun at one of Mrs. Cuttle's house parties, he displays always the same mixture of kindness, shrewdness, and social vitality. This Tommy Ogle was, after all, not very different from the Tommy Ogle of the firemen's ball. The main separation is a superficial one, concerned with the proper tips for footmen and the ritual of a fashionable dinner party.

After this I was introduced to all the others. I had a confused impression of Baron Vonderkrank and Baron Von Schwarts—the one with a little upturned blond mustache, the other with a little upturned black mustache—clicking their heels together in Continental fashion. The rest was a blur of evening clothes bifurcated and of evening clothes flowing. But, though at the time I made but few distinctions, I must include at this point a few rapid portraits of these people whom I afterward learned to know so well; must construct out of years of familiarity a canvas showing this, the most spectacular set of New York's fashionable society.

First of all, there was Miss Juanita Douglas, Mrs. Cuttle's most intimate friend. Miss

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Douglas was one of those perennial spinsters who are so useful to matrons in society. She could always be depended on for vivacity and good humor. She was a kind of mortar to fill in awkward chinks in house parties. And when Mrs. Cuttle was arranging a dinner she used frequently to say, "There's Juanita; let old Daniel Chews take her in—she doesn't mind how much she's bored." Miss Douglas might have been anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five. Certainly the young men who always crowded about her asked no such extraneous question.

Then there was Mrs. Stephen Harcourt, who, as Celeste Dillon, was a belle. Beautiful and vivacious, her dark eyes were always roving, and it was said that she could never thoroughly enjoy a flirtation with one man, because the man to his right was meantime slipping into somebody else's hands. Her husband, a meager and polite little man, supplied the pin to which she was the glittering brooch. He merely fastened her to New York society.

Perhaps the loveliest of all the women present that evening was Mrs. Norman Digly. She always wore her lips very red, and to-night they lay like a scarlet rose on that creamy platter of

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

skin of hers. Her tiny feet were arched like those which beat time to the rainfall of the guitar on the banks of the Guadalquivir. The eyes of every man in the room returned to her again and again, no matter how tempting other visual excursions; and between this admiration and her stood Norman Digly, a big, somber-looking man.

Jules Cambartm supplied that night, together with the two barons, the timber of eligible young men. Jules was a bachelor in the active practice of his profession. Like his feminine counterpart, Juanita Douglas, he was the very cement of house parties. He could always be relied upon to make things comfortable for the unattractive débutante. He could equally well be relied upon not to fall in love with the most attractive débutante. Tall and sandy, and with something a little wistful in his expression, he inspired one of Mrs. Cuttle's characteristic comments.

"Jules," said she, "is one of those men who are born bachelors and then set aside to cool."

There was an elderly man of military bearing present at this house party, and later I came to know him very well. He was Mr. Edgely

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Wimbledon, a widower of some years' standing; and at the house parties you generally found him playing cards in the reception-room on the left of the great living-room. These games of whist generally included Mrs. Henry Friske, a handsome widow of about his own age, with whom for years he maintained a dignified and very remarkable friendship.

For the rest, the inner circle comprised Mr. and Mrs. Armington Squibbs, distinguished by the fact that Mr. Squibbs was very wealthy and that Mrs. Squibbs was the daughter of the haughty old dowager who for so many years was an acknowledged leader of society. Tommy Ogle's wife, the widow whom he had married several years before this time, was also in the party. So, too, was Miss Veronica Grey.

Miss Grey was at this time of the shameful age of twenty-five. "Why in the deuce doesn't the girl marry?" asked all her friends, impatiently. "Here she's been out seven years now, and there never was a girl in New York who got so much attention." Her parents were impoverished—they had now a mere million—and they looked at her ruefully as at a non-dividend-bearing bond. Yet, even at my first glimpse of her that night, I could see

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

why she did not marry the men who had presented themselves.

Alone among the set assembled here, this girl showed the power to dream. The others were like so many tops, spinning about so fast that you caught only a hard glitter from that fast-revolving surface. But she—she— I can see her now, talking to some bachelor, with her air of looking out beyond him through an open window. It was, perhaps, from some ancestor of the Irish bogs that she inherited the dreams. Certainly it was from Ireland that she got the delicately lifted profile, the cheeks of carnations, the black hair, and the eyes of evening gray.

This group represented some of Mrs. Cuttle's most intimate friends. Multiply this by the dozen other groups included at the big affairs and you get the essence of the society with whom my duties were concerned.

The next morning at eight my breakfast was brought to me in my white-and-gold sitting-room by the trig little parlor-maid. Almost immediately afterward the butler I had engaged the day before entered with Mrs. Cuttle's morning mail. Compared with New York and Newport, where invitations and letters and regrets and appeals used to come down in cata-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

racts of forty and fifty, this mail at The Torrents was very light. This morning, for instance, there were only five or six letters and some bills, and these I took immediately to Mrs. Cuttle's bedroom.

Before I went, however, the butler handed me the menus for the day's luncheon and dinner which had been submitted by the chef.

"Please have Mrs. Cuttle O. K. it," said Parrins.

I was grateful for the suggestion. Had he not given it I should probably still be holding those menus in my hand.

It was Mrs. Cuttle's habit to eat breakfast at half past seven. No matter how late she had been up the night before, her maid always brought coffee and rolls to her room at that hour. Consequently she had long since finished when I entered the beautiful bedroom she occupied.

It had woodwork of dove gray; the furniture was of the same tone; the canopy over the bed, the curtains and the upholstery, were of the softest rose, through which just whispered a note of silver. From this ambush of roses and dew now looked forth the morning face of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle. Her bold eyes still



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

showed traces of the sooty make-up, and she wore a pink kimono that was slightly soiled.

"Good morning," said she, curtly.

At the same moment a Mexican spaniel, the size of a penwiper, which was lying at the foot of her bed, gave a dry, sandy little bark.

"Shut up, Popocatepetl!" cried Mrs. Cuttle, angrily; and then, as the tiny cur shrank back, she cried: "I hate that dog—it's so cringing. It has the soul of a slave."

I said nothing, but my hand shook a little as I gave her the chef's menus and the morning's mail. I felt a certain bond between Popocatepetl and myself.

"All right," said she, gruffly, handing over the menus. Then, like an angry November gale tearing about through dry leaves, she rustled through those notes and bills.

"Accept," commanded she, tossing me an invitation to attend a luncheon at a neighboring country place.

With trembling fingers I marked down her instructions in pencil at the top of the invitation.

"Regret," said she, tossing over the next, an invitation to a house party in Delaware.

"Any reason?" asked I.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"No," she snapped; "I'm not going to tell them why I don't do things."

After we had thus finished with the letters Mrs. Cuttle told me to get a blank book out of the stationery-cupboard in my sitting-room.

"You are to keep a record of my engagements," said she; "and I keep one, too. That way we don't get mixed up."

As I went out she handed me a check-book.

"I suppose Miss Venaturra told you all about this. As I O. K. a bill you write the check. I just sign 'em, you see."

I took the check-book and edged toward the door.

"There's ten thousand deposited in bank to my account," she called after me.

After I returned to my sitting-room I summoned the new butler, the new chef, the new parlor-maid, and the chambermaid. When these, the four chief servants of the household, appeared before me, I sat back judicially.

"You all know your duties," said I, addressing them collectively; "and I'm not going to interfere so long as things are going the way I think they ought to go. I'm sure we shall get along all right."

"Yes, madam," said the butler, the parlor-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

maid, the chef, and the chambermaid, clinging to each syllable as though it had mucilage attached.

I don't think they suspected that I had studied this part carefully with Mrs. Dearborn.

After this I went to work answering the notes which had come that morning. For these communications I used, not the gold-crested stationery of Newport and New York, but simple note-paper inscribed with merely the name and address of the country place. Next I started to write checks for such monthly bills as Mrs. Cuttle had O. K'd. And such bills! Before that morning was over I had used up three thousand dollars of the ten thousand which awaited disposal.

At about eleven o'clock in the morning the house party commenced to unfold reluctant petals. A few of the more restless spirits descended from the hands of their respective valets and maids. Traps were ordered for those who wished to drive, and by noon the whole hive had swarmed from the house into the acres upon acres of beautiful country that comprised this country estate.

It was about twelve o'clock and I had just finished writing those tremendous checks when

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Tommy Ogle entered my sitting-room. He was dressed in knickers and Norfolk jacket, which is the inevitable morning attire of gentlemen at a country-house party, and his manner was benign.

"Hello, Lady from the South!" he greeted me in his high falsetto voice. "How are you getting along?"

There was something about Tommy Ogle that was like cold-cream. You could be all chapped and frostbitten from the wintry winds of society intercourse, and the moment you saw him it was all right. It was this easy kindliness of his that, apart from the gift of fun-making, made him the delight of dowagers and of shy school-girls.

"Covered with goose-flesh," replied I to his question.

"'Sh!" said he. "Don't let her know it. She hates people who are afraid of her."

"What shall I do?" I asked.

"Just sit tight," said he, swinging himself up on my desk and smiling down on me. "You'll soon learn the ropes. And you can pick up an awful lot from the servants, you know. A well-trained butler can correct the habits of the most impossible master. Of course

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

you'll probably have heaps of trouble with the lists just at first—but you'll get to know who's who. Don't worry. And don't think of mind-ing Miss Sadie"—calling Mrs. Cuttle by the name used by many of her intimates. "She doesn't mean half the things she says. Just you let her bark. Every time she barks she wags, you know. And she'll probably wag a new dress every time after she's had a tantrum. But remember what I say—keep your eye on the butler."

That afternoon the house party dispersed and I was left alone in the great house with Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle. During those next few days I became somewhat used to my duties. At the same time Mrs. Cuttle became altogether used to me. Gradually the "Good morning" sloughed from her greeting and she would blow in my eyes every day like a dust-storm. She threw letters into my lap with a gruff monosyllable of directions; she complained about the bills; and she would send word by me to the cook that if he couldn't think up something new for the menus he had better take to cobbling.

"Tell him that if he hasn't got anything in his head except that sauce hollandaise and

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

that mousse parfait, he can get it out of Gaston's book," she would say. "What does he think I paid twenty-five dollars for a receipt-book for if he won't use it? Now just go for him!"

This message I was wont to convey to the kitchen with the same tremors that overtook me when I received it.

"Gaston—bah!" would reply the sultan of the kitchen, standing there with his arms akimbo and his white cap pulled down over one stormy eyebrow. "What is it zat he knows zat I do not, madam? I make ze better sauces, ze better *pâtés*, ze better everysing. Gaston! Bah! Poof!"

In this way the social secretary must stand as a dike between the affronted mistress and the affronted household. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Cuttle never had any communication with any of the nineteen servants except the butler. Many of them she did not know even by name. Parrins and I interpreted the royal word.

Good old Parrins! I took Tommy Ogle's hint and clung to the whistling mane of this English dignitary with a fervor that could be disturbed by no roadside scenery. There, for



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

instance, was the claret-cup upon which Mrs. Dearborn had laid so much stress. One day I found Parrins in the butler's pantry, standing before a lake of red wine which threatened to overflow its banks of punch-bowl.

"Hello, Parrins! What are you up to?" asked I, casually.

"Just finishing the claret-cup," explained he.

"Oh, let me taste it!" cried I, hovering over him.

He filled me a glass and handed it to me with great solemnity.

"This is simply fine!" said I; and I don't think that Parrins ever realized that this specimen of claret-cup was the dividing-line between empiricism and mere speculation.

"It is Lord Wearyton's own receipt," responded he, planting a grave little smile between the beds of whisker.

"Madam" was, by the way, the form of address that was used by all the servants in speaking to either Mrs. Cuttle or me. And how Mrs. Cuttle abhorred it!

"Madam!" she would repeat, scornfully, after the obsequious footman. "Madam!" And she fairly rinsed her mouth of the objectionable syllables. I really think, too, that she would

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

have been much more pleased if one of those handsome red-granite servitors had rushed boldly up to her and cried: "Here, Cuttle! Here's your wrap."

By the end of the first week I had used up eight of the ten thousand dollars which Mrs. Cuttle had told me awaited my disposal. With hands trembling, I told her of this enormous inundation upon her resources.

"Well," retorted she, angrily, "what of it? Haven't you paid nearly all of the month's bills?"

"Ye-es," murmured I.

"Well, then?" cried she, impatiently.

"But," stammered I, "I thought it would have to do for some months. It would last us several years in the South."

"Mrs. Pemberton, you are a fool!" said she. "I am satisfied if my bills don't go over that in a month." And she angrily affixed her signature to the seven-hundred-dollar check which was the recompense to the butcher for the month of September.

As she did this she looked up at me suddenly.

"Your hand is too big for a check," complained she. "Can't you file it down a little?"

I may say right here that penmanship is one

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

of the essentials for a social secretary. In order to find favor her hand must pay equal tribute to legibility and to the mode. To any other society woman Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's act of engaging me without ever having seen my penmanship would have seemed as wildly impulsive as buying a house without looking at the interior.

### III

LIFE AT THE TORRENTS—THE GRIM ENCHANTMENT OF WEEKLY HOUSE PARTIES—COSTLY CALAMITIES FOR THE HOSTESS—SOCIAL LIONS IN CAPTIVITY—TEA-TABLE CONVERSATIONS.

AFTER I had slipped into my little groove, life at The Torrents passed very quietly. October and November waved their torch of crimson over our heads, and the only social conflagration they started was the weekly house party. To this dire event were shaped my chief activities all the time that Mrs. Cuttle remained at her country place.

From some time in September, when the wealthy leave their villas at Newport and Bar Harbor, until some time after the horse show, when they come up to town, fashionable society is about evenly divided between those who are bored by entertaining at house parties and those who are bored by being entertained. From the Saturday afternoon when the guests arrive until

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the Monday morning when they depart you seldom see a happy face. Everybody sits round and glares at everybody else, as much as to say, "Here's the house—where's the party?" Yet the whole Social Register lies dumbly under the grim enchantment.

About the middle of the week Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle used to feel the nudge of Social Destiny.

"Call up So-and-so," she would say to me, "and see whether he can come down over the week-end."

As a rule, we had the same set I have already described. Now and then, however, we made some alterations. Mr. and Mrs. George Silver or Mr. and Mrs. Hambledon Chucks would be substituted for Mr. and Mrs. Armington Squibbs. Miss Veronica Grey would be supplanted by some of the crispest and most tender of the season's débutantes. That non-shrinkable bachelor, Jules Cambartin, would be let out in favor of a rich young man whose proximity the mother of the crisp and tender débutante felt to be particularly desirable. And there were times when we succeeded in ensnaring a wandering baron wild.

With the married people I did not have

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

much trouble. Their spirits had long since been broken by the yoke of the house party, and they walked in meekly enough. When, however, it came to eligible men, or even single men, I felt the thorns of my position. There were so many places to go and there were so few of them that their position was impregnable. If at any time, in fact, somebody starts a bureau where the hostess may rent presentable young men for the week-end, I am sure the society women will provide the uniforms.

"Get Monteith Robbins," would command Mrs. Cuttle on Wednesday; and thereupon I would start angling for this bright fish.

"Oh, Mr. Robbins," I would plead over the 'phone, "can't you come down to us this Saturday?"

I would hear a shy, wild note through the receiver:

"Awfully sorry, you know; but I really can't. I'm going to the Milcent Gambles this week."

When I had reported this conversation to Mrs. Cuttle her face would steam in sudden rage.

"Going to the Milcent Gambles, is he? I guess we know what for. Everybody knows that Monteith Robbins couldn't support him-



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

self without his week-end gambling. Well, we're not opening up offices for poor young men yet a while."

And to her credit be it said that the great social leader never encouraged the gambling for which some of her associates' parties were so notorious. If there were any stakes at all, they were small, and the impecunious young man—or woman—found at her home little chance for supplementing a meager income.

After Monteith had eluded me, I would next try Quentin Van Feder Nest, the wealthy young man for whom all the mammas were then angling.

"Call up Quentin," commanded Mrs. Cuttle, savagely. "Miriam Grey is crazy to get him for Veronica, and she asked me to have him. Funny how these people think I ought to run a matrimonial agency! Well, I've worked hard over Veronica Grey. I've had her on house parties until I'm sick of seeing her. And what good does it do? She wouldn't accept anything except a knight in armor."

Her tone in speaking of Veronica always declared: "Heavens! What a fool that girl is to make such a fuss about a little thing like marriage!" Whereupon she would take the

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

occasion to tell her intimates how her own matrimonial decision had been reached.

"I was a poor girl, living up in the country," she would say; "and I got tired of dusting and making beds. I had two rich beaus, and one day I just said to myself, 'I'm going to get married.' So I sent a note to both of my young men and made up my mind to take the one that got there first." And she would throw back her head and laugh uproariously at this solution of a problem that has entangled the footsteps of so many maidens.

Mr. Quentin Van Feder Nest was one of those young gentlemen who never say anything except "Yah!" and "Jolly little party, don't you know!" When I got him over the 'phone he was wont to give something that sounded like a cross between a gargle and a bleat.

"Who's going to be there—yah?" he would ask, cautiously.

"Oh, Veronica Grey, and Mr. and Mrs. George Silver—"

"Well—yah—I'm awfully sorry—yah—but the governor has a kind of hunting party on this week. Awfully sorry—yah!"

"Fool!" would rage Mrs. Cuttle when I reported this response. "Hunting party—yes, I

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

guess so! The *Weekly Gadfly* knows all about his little parties. They had a whole lot about him and little Miss Kalcie Mine in this number. They say his mother is worried to death for fear he is going to marry her. I should think her mother would be worried for fear she would marry him!"

During the course of a morning's 'phone hunt for single men I would probably exhaust the ranks of the wealthy, the titled, or the amusing before I came away with a single trophy. And by the time I got through I had sunk to a plane of consciousness where I muttered, "We'll take you if you own evening clothes."

Having completed the sunny task of enrolling victims, Mrs. Cuttle and I would then confer upon the subject of how best to alleviate their sufferings.

"What shall I do with the devils?" would ask Mrs. Cuttle. "They're tired of driving; they're tired of dancing; they're tired of looking at one another."

It was, indeed, a hard problem. Sometimes we met the spiritual and intellectual needs of our guests by a man who took bunnies from his top-hat and canaries from his stocking feet.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Sometimes we had a musical-comedy star come down and sing the latest wink at life's poor vices. Nearly always we had an orchestra from town for the Saturday night's dancing. All the practical details of engaging these entertainers fell, of course, upon me, and I soon got a complete insight into the amount of money the wealthy will pay in order to be thoroughly bored.

These house parties were, indeed, a very costly calamity. The musicians were paid about forty dollars an evening. The magician, who often came down, received fifty dollars. A singer was paid the same amount or more. And the expense of providing food for these affairs may be guessed from the fact that the party of from fourteen to twenty guests brought down, as a rule, a corresponding number of servants. Think of those forty servants in the house at one time, and do not wonder that the provisions which were sent to us on Saturday morning, to last over Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, generally amounted to four hundred and fifty or five hundred dollars. It is safe to say that not one of these house parties ever costs less than four hundred and fifty dollars; and if you multiply this by the four weeks

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

in the month you will see one of the inlets that swept in upon my ten-thousand-dollar allowance.

The guests at our parties were generally bidden to come down on the four-o'clock train on Saturday, and great were the preparations for their reception. They were met at the station by traps and victorias—later, of course, supplanted by motors—and a huge yellow brake carried the valets and maids of the visitors to their transplanted duties. Then, when they reached the house, the guests were assigned to their quarters at the same time that their attendants were assigned to theirs. In connection with these guest-rooms it is interesting to note that each door had a metal slip, like that on a ship cabin, through which the butler passed a card bearing the name of the occupant. These cards I myself, of course, filled out just as soon as we had arranged the list of guests.

A few moments after their arrival the guests came trooping down for tea. In the great living-room everything was in readiness. A footman had placed the tea things on a table opposite one of the big, glowing fireplaces. The divans in front of the two mantels were heaped high

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

with cushions. Some one of the women—often Miss Juanita Douglas—started making the tea. Everybody took a cup and grabbed a sandwich, and then sat round looking as though he were staying away from a party because grandma had the erysipelas.

“Nice afternoon,” commented Mr. Skiley Lark, who represented one of the captive bachelors of the assemblage.

“Awfully!” drawled Mrs. Stephen Harcourt, who had had her flirtation with Mr. Skiley Lark two years before, and who felt no interest in putting flowers in the cemetery.

Up-stairs, Celeste, Mrs. Harcourt’s maid, now unpacking the boxes in Mrs. Harcourt’s room, probably found more to say to Hawkins, Mr. Skiley Lark’s valet, now laying out the sacrificial evening garments of this well-known offering on the altar of high society.

“Saw Ethel Barrymore’s new play th’ other night,” contributed Mrs. George Silver from the midst of her little group in one corner of the room.

“Oh, I hear her gowns are simply beautiful!” replied Mrs. Armington Squibbs, a little gleam of interest lighting from the ashes of complete boredom.



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Oh, ripping!" spoke up Tommy Ogle, who always knew exactly how the seams should run.

"Guess whom I saw at the first night of that show," said Mrs. Norman Digly.

"Who?" asked everybody together in a voice tense with sandwich, and with one of the few emotions through which they could flee the dreary burden of the ego.

"Why, Eliza Burnett and that dreadful artist she picked up in Rome."

"No!" was the solid chorus of these people, never too calloused to feel the outrage of somebody else's actions.

"Should think Tom would be awfully jealous," drawled Mr. Skiley Lark.

"Oh, he is! She's commencing to be talked about frightfully. And—why, the *Gadfly* had a nasty little thing in about her only a few weeks ago," said Mrs. Stephen Harcourt.

I was nearly always present at the house-party tea-times, and I can honestly say that this is a specimen of conversation which might have been extracted from any dinner party, any luncheon, or any house party that took place in Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's set. Personal topics, dress, reducing, a popular novel or a

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

popular play—below this meringue our guests never penetrated.

This was particularly strange in view of the fact that some of these people had a highly galvanized interest in other things. Mrs. Norman Digly, for instance, was a connoisseur, and her home in New York represented her own personal taste in fine old furniture, rugs, and etchings. As for Jules Cambartin, it was not until I had been with Mrs. Cuttle for several years that I discovered he had one of the most noted collections of first editions in the country, and that a book of his on old china was an authoritative work of its kind.

I confronted Mrs. Cuttle with this discovery one day.

"What!" said she. "Jules write a book! Never!"

The next time she saw him, however, she took him aside and questioned him.

"Say, look here, Jules," said she, "Mrs. Pemberton tells me that you wrote a book."

He looked very conscious of his infirmity. "I—well, I kind of did," said he.

"Well, I never!" commented Mrs. Cuttle.

I am not surprised that she was overcome. In the several years since I first met him I

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

had never heard him betray by a single word that he had any interest separated from the number of new frocks worn by Mrs. Carlton Vandalstrode, or the amount it was costing somebody to get into society, or the way Mrs. Paul Armweak was taking her débutante daughter from the reach of some impecunious young man. He, like Mrs. Norman Digly, took off his mental shoes before crossing our threshold and never disturbed by a single intellectual footprint the shining level of his companions' conversation.

When tea was over the house party marked time until about seven o'clock. After that it went up and solemnly arrayed itself in the clothes which had been laid out by the Celestes and Hawkinses of the assemblage. At half past eight dinner was served; and when this meal was concluded they all resigned themselves to dancing, cards, and a professional entertainer.

Breakfast was always an imposing ceremonial at our house parties and was ordered the night before. Sometime during the evening you would see the Roycroft figure of Parrins making way through the respective groups of martyrs. He had a note-book in hand, and he was taking

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

down what each guest desired for the morning meal and at what hour he wished it.

“Toast and coffee and a poached egg, please—half past eleven,” would murmur Tommy Ogle from the thicket of ladies who surrounded him.

“Rolls and coffee and a three-minute egg. And—oh, yes—just a tiny piece of bacon on the side,” would languish Mrs. Stephen Harcourt, as if she were lisping, “Moonlight—roses—dew.”

All these breakfasts were, of course, served in the various bedrooms; and they were served at an hour when most of us have dictated twenty letters or finished the week's ironing. I have seen talented sleepers in my life. I have watched the wilted forms on the tilted chairs that line Main Street on an August day. But I have never beheld such single-hearted devotion to a cause as that which inspired the guests at our parties to stay in bed until almost noon. No ill-bred wakefulness must threaten the prestige of a professional house-partyist. And if you are not born to that sort of thing, you just lie there and crunch your teeth, and mutter, “I'll stay here till eleven if it kills me!”

## IV

PARRINS, THE BUTLER, AND HIS EXHAUSTING  
TASKS—THE SOLITARY EARLY BIRD—IDIO-  
SYNCRASIES OF GUESTS—THE WOMAN WHO  
BROUGHT HER OWN BED-LINEN.

WHILE the house party trailed its gloomy pinions over the Cuttle household Parrins had a busy time, for Parrins arranged all the breakfast-trays—sometimes twenty-four in number; and Parrins arranged them with a skill and an eye for color that generally go into some imperishable work of art. Each tray was of white *pâpier-maché*, covered with a cloth the lace edge of which showed silk of the color of the room for which it was destined. The china observed the same consideration for the room, and the flowers which invariably accompanied a breakfast intruded no alien note upon draperies and wall-paper.

Let us be concrete. One of our guest-rooms at The Torrents was done in draperies of pale

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

green, shot with silver. For this chamber the silk that peeped from the lace edge of the tray-cover was green, and the flowers were nearly always lilies-of-the-valley or gardenias. The china was of the most exquisite sea-foam tint, and the only colorless things were the napkin and the toast napkin. For our mauve room we generally sent orchids, and both silk and china adopted some suggestion of lavender. Our pink rooms were accorded pink roses or sweet-peas; and our blue room, forget-me-nots or blue hyacinths. Flowers for the breakfast-tray were the subject of great anxiety to Parrins, and he always ordered what he wanted from the gardener the night before serving. As a rule, these breakfast flowers were arranged in vases; but sometimes a single bloom—as, for example, one perfect rose—was laid across the napkin.

The breakfast-trays were all furnished in the butler's pantry, and as soon as each was completed it was taken from Parrins by one of the footmen to the room for which it was destined. At the door of the bedchamber the footman was met by the maid or valet of the guest occupying the room, and the ceremony of the morning meal was completed.



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

There was one person who did not share in the pomp of the late breakfast-tray. This was the husband of my employer. At half past seven, exactly the time when his indefatigable wife was having her morning rolls and coffee, and exactly four hours before Tommy Ogle lifted languid eyes to the dew-drenched rose beside his dainty toast-rack, Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle was down in the dining-room wending his way through a breakfast of ham and eggs. Now and then there would be some man in the house sufficiently lost to the responsibilities of his position to get down at the same time; but, as a rule, the massive figure sat there alone in the great dining-room with its white, fluted chairs and its paneled paintings.

Right after breakfast Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle would go out on his estate, and perhaps the house party would never catch even a feather from that fleeing form. At lunch he was generally two courses behind time; and, as he arrived at the table in trousers covered with mud at the edges, he looked, among the jaunty Norfolks and knickers of his men guests, like a heavy old freight-sloop among so many brisk little naphtha-launches.

Sunday luncheon was always the great cli-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

max to one of our house parties at The Torrents, for to this meal we would often bid the parties gathered together at the houses of several of our neighbors on the Hudson. Carriages, traps, and motors, all laden with fresh victims, would come from all directions; and, as forty people sat down to luncheon up-stairs, at least that number of visiting maids, valets, and chauffeurs gathered about the dining-table down-stairs. The problem of feeding and lodging so many alien servants was indeed a tremendous one. To this end a number of extra beds for men servitors had been placed in the upper story of the handsome coach-house at The Torrents. And the musicians for the Saturday-night's dancing were generally accommodated at the lodging-house which Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle maintained for the men employed on his estate.

Before I leave the subject of country-house parties I must not omit to mention the idiosyncrasies of some of our guests. These were sometimes as lurid as those of Prince Kaunitz. As against the toothbrush which the great prime minister of Maria Theresa insisted upon taking with him to dinner parties I place, for instance, the bed-linen which Mrs. Roland Deland, that

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

beautiful evergreen widow who was so often bidden to our congregations of gloom, invariably brought along with her.

The first time I encountered this strange bit of caution was once when, in passing through the halls, I found the maid of Mrs. Deland tearing off the sheets of the bed in the room assigned to the widow.

"Why, what does all this mean?" asked I of our chambermaid.

The maid shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, she always brings everything with her, madam—sheets, pillow-cases, and towels."

In great excitement I reported this incident to Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle. She also shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked she. "It isn't only here that she brings 'em. She does it every place. She wouldn't any more come to a house without her own linen than an elephant would come to a circus without its trunk."

For a long time I pondered upon this theme. Mrs. Deland's linen was fine; but so was ours. Mrs. Deland's linen was lace-trimmed, and monogrammed and crested; but so, too, was ours. Mrs. Deland's linen was germless; but

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

ours was equally so. The habit was, in fact, as unreasonable as a wart.

A side-panel of Mrs. Deland was Mrs. B. C. Traymore. If you are born in that humble rank of life where you disguise your own feelings of discomfort out of a delicate consideration for your hostess, you don't move the furniture in the guest-room. You lie about the granite mattress on which you have tossed fretfully the whole night through. You dress meekly before a mirror placed in a covert unpenetrated by the single shy gas-jet that flickers at the other side of the room. And you do not once mention the fact that the ink on your desk long since passed into the glacial period. If, however, you are Mrs. B. C. Traymore, you are bound by no such paltry sentiments.

Every time, in fact, that widely known matron came to The Torrents you would have thought the room had been suddenly occupied by a piano-tuner and a professional furniture-mover. Things tossed and squeaked and rolled. The dressing-table was moved out into the room. The chairs were tossed about like your steamer-trunk on a bad night at sea. By morning not a single article of furniture in the room occupied

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the position it had the night before. Yet this, like Mrs. Deland's bed-linen, was tolerated—not only by Mrs. Cuttle, but by all the other hostesses in society.

One last word about the strange habits of the fashionable house party. Nobody is ever introduced to anybody else. The whole thing is conducted on the assumption that the elect all know one another; that the highly finished soul leaps to instant recognition of another highly finished soul. This omission, however, sometimes led to very amusing complications.

Once, for example, Miss Juanita Douglas came up to me at the end of a long, rainy Sunday.

"Who is that dark man over there?" said she—"that man with the interesting, foreign-looking face. I've been talking to him ever since yesterday. I've flirted with him, and I've compared English country houses with him. I've sounded him on salads and road-engines and second cousins. I've done everything but promise to marry him, and— Find out what his name is."

After the horse show Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle came up to town; and, although all through

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the winter we kept taking week-end parties down to The Torrents, this particular form of entertainment was slurred over in favor of the dinners and dances, to which I, as social secretary, now contributed such an intimate part.



## V

THE NEW YORK SEASON—THREE DINNERS AT  
\$1,000 EACH—SACRED ELEMENTS OF THE  
FIRST DINNER—MRS. FALCONVAUX, SOCIAL  
ENTERTAINER—AVOIDING PITFALLS.

THE fashionable set wear their city homes like snails. For perhaps nine months of the year these edifices perch idly on the shoulders of society; their windows are stolid with shutters and boards; their rugs and handsome tapestries are in the care of various storage establishments; the only spark of vitality is the maid or housekeeper left in charge. Not until early December do their owners come back from country places or from foreign shores. Then, when Alonzo Jones, the shoe clerk, and Phyllis Cahill, the typist, are already looking forward to next summer's two weeks' outing in the mosquito-haunted boarding-house that sits by the solemn waves, the Social Register takes up the burden of winter.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Mr. and Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle and I came up from The Torrents early in the last month of the year. It was not, however, until January that the season swept into its broad curve of social energy. Between that date and the beginning of Lent occur hundreds of dinners, dances, luncheons, and theater parties. For eight weeks or so not a day lies round loose. December itself, however, is a dull month, and Christmas always takes the fashionable set back to their country estates for a family celebration.

But, although stagnant on the surface, December fairly rippled with underground currents, and I began now to experience the full force of my responsibilities. During that first week in town I was already making preparation for Mrs. Cuttle's big dinner. This was scheduled for the early part of January, and in order to make sure of our guests we had to send out invitations three weeks beforehand.

Even before we issued these invitations, however, I had started a little preliminary sounding among other New York hostesses in order to avoid any conflict of dates. For instance, I called up Mrs. Armington Squibbs, just back from her place in the country.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Oh, Mrs. Squibbs," I said, "have you heard of any one's giving a dinner on the second of January?"

Mrs. Squibbs dusted her voice a little. "Ahem! No, I have not. Does Mrs. Cuttle want that date? I have taken the fourth for my dinner."

"Fine!" said I. "Well, I'll call up the Blanchlaw Stems."

I must explain here that the first dinner given by the fashionable New York hostess in her town house represents the most sacred elements of our metropolitan society. Family, money, and real estate united those sixty guests privileged to sit at the earliest of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's "messes."

The second dinner was more or less of a mixture; and the third one was a pebble waking from the depths of the social pond many concentric circles. This last occasion took in the people not yet sure of themselves, the people fettered by some chain of fortune; the many who were glad to be seen on any rung of the social ladder.

Of the hundred and eighty people we entertained at our three big dinners, the Blanchlaw Stems were always included in the first sixty.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

They were included in everybody else's initial list. And if you had no other way of telling the time, you knew the winter social season was on when the distinguished lawyer and diplomat rose like a lighthouse from his bed of oysters.

After I had called up the Blanchlaw Stems and Tommy Ogle—himself a planet in the first-night galaxies—I considered that we might stake our claim to the second of January. No other affair had been heard of, and I commenced getting out the invitations. Then, for the first time, I tilted in earnest with the Social Register.

The form in which Mrs. Cuttle would give me her list was decidedly careless.

"Invite the Browns," she said to me one morning.

"Which Browns?" asked I.

"Oh, the Kensington Browns, of course," she retorted, impatiently.

"Where do they live?" persisted I.

"Oh, I don't know the exact address. Look them up in the Social Register."

This sounded simple enough, but when I reached those hallowed pages I found a whole section dedicated to Kensington Browns. The name had first been borne by a gouty old general of the Mexican War, and since then it had been

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

warmed up for a nephew, three grandnephews, and several second cousins once removed. The worst of it is, too, that most of the other names in New York society disport themselves in similar schools.

Often in my perplexity I used to call up Tommy Ogle, and this authority was invariably gracious in helping me discover the fine shades of meaning that lurk in a name. Once and only once, and in a way I shall soon relate, I brought down a wrong specimen of the genus.

When we had made out the lists I set to work filling in names and dates on the blanks left in the engraved invitations. These appeared on exquisite note-paper, embossed in gold at the center top with a crest, the motto and the initials R. C. They read as follows:

MR. AND MRS. RHINEBECK CUTTLE

REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF

\_\_\_\_\_’S

COMPANY AT DINNER

ON \_\_\_\_\_

AT \_\_\_\_\_ O’CLOCK

Very often after I had finished with an invitation, however, Mrs. Cuttle changed her mind.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Tear that invitation up," she would command, fiercely. "I'm not going to have those people. Fill in with the Spencely Twomblys."

Perhaps half an hour later the Spencely Twomblys would prove equally unappetizing and I should be obliged to make another change. In this manner I altered some invitations perhaps half a dozen times before Mrs. Cuttle simmered down. Her dinner list always represented exhaustion rather than a fresh discrimination.

Meantime I had called up Woods, the caterer, and engaged his services for the date of the second.

Mrs. Falconvaux, the social entertainer who assisted Mrs. Cuttle in the development of so many of her big entertainments, had also been instructed to think up something for the after-dinner show, and to give us an estimate of its cost. Then, when we got back from Christmas at The Torrents, we set to work in earnest.

First of all, I wrote the sixty-two place-cards. These were, as always, heavy white cards crested in gold. Also, I addressed thirty envelopes to the thirty men guests and inclosed in each a card bearing the name of the woman he was to take in.



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Meantime Mrs. Cuttle and I worked every morning on the problem of placing the guests.

In those simple states of society unshredded by the scissors of divorce the matter of putting your guest side by whom does not assume such terrifying proportions. Among the fashionable wealthy, however, amiability can never be taken as a premise. In the arrangements of the five tables set at each of Mrs. Cuttle's dinners Mrs. Cuttle and I used to labor for days in order that Mr. Bluebeard should not be annoyed by the presence of his last-but-one wife, and that Mrs. Phalares Cand should sit at a different table from the one spoiled by the presence of her first husband's brother.

These mornings in her town house Mrs. Cuttle used to receive me in a bedroom that was muffled in red. There was a gloomy kind of majesty about this apartment that made it quite famous. Entering it, one always recalled the words of a noted New York decorator who had been taken through the house.

"Ugh! Gwacious!" he had recoiled. "This woom would give me the hydowphobia, Mrs. Cuttle!"

When I got in she was generally scowling at

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

me from under the velvet canopy; and as, feeling very much like Little Red Riding-Hood, I drew nearer I would discover a heap of white paper slips on her knees. These were slips on which she had written the names of the sixty guests, and by this method of visualization she was trying to avoid the embarrassments of the tandem marriage situation.

"Well," she would say, "I've got 'em all fixed now."

I would cast my eyes on the slips of paper diagraming the five tables; and then, before I had a chance to comment, she would discover some mistake.

"Heavens!" she would exclaim, in horror. "I've put old Humwasp opposite his own son at the second table; and they haven't spoken since Archie took his mother's part in the Humwasps' divorce suit. What shall I do with Archie and his wife?"

"Put them at the table in the upper left-hand corner," was my suggestion.

But when she had transferred them to the space indicated she immediately found another complication.

"Oh, Lord! We've got them here at the same table with the Steppinses; and Archie's wife

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

hasn't spoken to them since she separated from Steppins's brother Nicholas."

We would thereupon shift this prickly pair until we finally got them at the table by the pantry door.

"Won't they be mad, though?" chuckled Mrs. Cuttle.

I may explain right here that the table by the pantry door was the foot of the class at a dinner party. As a rule, the young people were stationed at this outpost, but every now and then some matron was exiled to the bleak coast-line. And the matron was never agreeable about it. As a matter of fact, it didn't make the slightest difference where you put most people. They were always discontented because they had not been put some other place.

At first, of course, I was not very helpful to Mrs. Cuttle in avoiding pitfalls. Later on, however, I knew all the slippery places by heart. Once only I made a mistake. That was when, several years later, I placed Mr. B. C. Traymore, who had married the divorced wife of Mr. G. L. Underplut, opposite the daughter who had not spoken to him in the five years which had elapsed since that marriage. It

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

was a frightful error and shook the party to the very depths of social consciousness.

The entire week before the dinner my time was taken up by Mrs. Falconvaux, the social entertainer of whom I have already spoken. A word here regarding this widely known figure. Mrs. Falconvaux was a woman in middle life who came of the class that now, through exigencies of fortune, she served in this way. She was extremely gracious in manner, beloved by all the Cuttle servants, and she enjoyed the distinction of being the only person to whom Mrs. Cuttle was invariably polite. Parrins, the butler, however, never trusted entirely to the amiable past; and always after she had visited the house he would tiptoe in to see me.

"How did she treat her to-day?" he would ask, fearfully. "Was she nice?"

"Oh, very!" I would say; and Parrins's smile would overflow to the neat side-whiskers.

Mrs. Falconvaux used to favor Mrs. Cuttle in giving her a first option on any such novelties as she might have in stock. The fact of it was, indeed, that all kinds of professional entertainers were so anxious for the advertisement of appearing at Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's home that they offered us their services free of charge. Nearly

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

always we got merrymakers at a lower rate than that paid by our competitors.

For this occasion Mrs. Falconvaux and Mrs. Cuttle had decided upon a little Irish operetta. This required the erection of a thatched cottage surrounded by grass, and other features of Irish life. Carpenters worked for days to set this up in one end of the great ball room. For the entire production we paid Mrs. Falconvaux seven hundred dollars. Add to this the florist's bill of two hundred and fifty dollars; the caterer's bill of three hundred and fifty; the expense of two extra chefs, employed for three days before the dinner took place; the orchestra's charge of one hundred and fifty dollars; and the actual cost of the food itself—and you get a total of about fifteen hundred dollars. The three big dinners given by Mrs. Cuttle during a season averaged a thousand dollars each.

It seemed a vast sum to pay for a single entertainment; yet it is a fact worthy of note that Mrs. Cuttle did not invest nearly so much in her dinners as did the most of her set. Mrs. Armington Squibbs, for instance, once gave five thousand dollars to a group of Metropolitan singers who tried in vain to get the attention of her dinner party. To one tenor alone she

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

paid two thousand dollars for his customary services.

Unlike Mrs. Squibbs and a great many of the very wealthy in her set, Mrs. Cuttle had a shrewd notion of what her associates really enjoyed, and she carefully modulated her entertainments to the tastes of those present. She knew perfectly well that most of her guests were fairly worn out by "Faust" and "Lohengrin." She herself, though she always firmly refused to submit to the full-term penalty of a box at the opera, had been forced to endure what was left of "Carmen" from a twelve-course dinner beginning at eight or eight-thirty. Consequently she absolutely would not domesticate "highbrow" music. We shall see just how her mutiny was rewarded.



## VI

WHAT IS A SERVICE?—PARRINS' IDEA OF A MIS-  
SPENT LIFE—THE CARE-FREE ATTITUDE OF  
THE RICH TOWARD THEIR DEBTS—THE SET  
WHERE BILLS SINK WITHOUT A BUBBLE.

**B**EFORE the date of the dinner I had various conversations with Woods, the caterer, who ministered to nearly all the fashionable New York families. Woods was a burly Englishman, the kind that in the historical novels holds a staircase against three; and in the winter season he used to hold that many dinners against an evening. He was, in fact, a recognized retainer of the American royalty.

The first time I met Woods he opened my eyes as to the care-free attitude of the wealthy toward their debts. Into the serene consciousness of many of Mrs. Cuttle's set a bill sank without a bubble. To Woods, for instance, a number of people owed bills of several years' standing.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Honest," said he, savagely, "I don't know how I'd run my business without Mrs. Cuttle. She is about the only person who pays up promptly the first of the month. The others owe so well they ought to take it up as a business; and if you were to be so ill-mannered as to press 'em—well, then you would be done for! Why, you wouldn't believe it, but Horatius Van Blank owes me three thousand dollars for my last two years' services!"

One day, when I was talking to Woods about the arrangements for the dinner, he lit a mysterious verbal fuse.

"How many are you going to have on a service?" asked he.

Service! What strange waif of phraseology was this? In my months at The Torrents I had never once encountered it.

"At the center table we'll have fourteen people, of course; and I suppose we'll have to make it seven on service, won't we?" the caterer continued.

"I should think so," responded I, agreeably.

"Then at the small tables I suppose we can put twelve on a service, can't we? Of course that's really too many—the first ones are through by the time you get things passed to

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the last; still, I don't see how else we can do it."

I looked at him for a moment. "Well," said I, with an airy wave of my hand, "you know what Mrs. Cuttle likes, and you just go ahead as you've always done."

By and by the florist came and annoyed me with the same phrase.

"How many services are you going to have?" asked he.

"Oh, I don't know. Ask Woods."

Then I went to find Parrins.

"Parrins," said I, for the first time baring my ignorance to the sphinxlike butler, "I know an Anglo-Saxon prayer or two and a few words in Chinook, but I don't know what a service is."

Parrins conveyed by a little gasp the shock given him by this revelation of a misspent life.

"Well, you see, madam," he explained, "there are always two men serving every course, and these take what you might call a regular beat. Sometimes they have ten people to wait on—sometimes less, sometimes more. The center table having fourteen is a bit awkward for a single service, and we have to have the two services."

Having mastered this social law, I went

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

ahead confidently; and at last the fateful second was at hand. At half past three on the day of the dinner Woods arrived with fourteen men at his back, and set to work bringing up the extra tables from the cellar. It is necessary to interpolate here that a caterer has in the busy seasons about fifty or sixty men in his employ, a number necessitated by the fact that very often in a single night he directs three or four big dinners. These men of his were selected on the same principle as that which moved Frederick of Prussia in forming his famous guard. They had to be six feet or over. They had to show off the liveries provided for them by the hostess.

To the average person, getting no deeper draughts of high society than fill the social columns of the daily papers, it would seem that the footmen of the wealthy exist in hives. Nothing is farther from the truth. The richest families in New York have only six little footmen in their homes. The other liveried servitors who appear at a grand occasion are brought by the caterer; and for them every New York hostess in Mrs. Cuttle's coterie maintains about twenty liveries packed away in wicker baskets until called forth by dinner or ball. These liveries are identical, of course,

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

with those worn by the footmen of the household, and they include everything save the patent-leather pumps. These must be provided by the men themselves.

Woods knew the exact locality of everything in the households he served. Straight as a homing-bird he could go to the correct china, the tables, the chairs, and the table-linen needed for our entertainments. Consequently, as soon as he arrived he and his men commenced on the work of setting up the tables. The four corner ones were brought up from the cellar, and were generally laid with cloths that he provided. A table-cloth is, however, only an episode in the life of a dinner party. Over each cloth was laid some exquisite centerpiece weighted with the patient toil of French or Belgian lace-makers. Each of these had the monogram and the crest, defined by lace within the border. The napkins reiterated this same message of sumptuousness.

The tables were set by the caterer under the supervision of Parrins and myself. On each a basket of nectarines balanced a basket of fruit. On each were jotted down four dishes of candies. On each appeared plates of heavy cream-colored, gold-banded china, flanked by the pre-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

liminary implements of oyster-fork, soup-spoon, and fish-fork, and containing a napkin folded with a shrewd sense of how best to display the crest and monogram and initials of Cluny lace. The wine-glasses were of the finest crystal, with filigree of silver or gold; and propped against one of these glasses stood the gold-crested menu-card.

The center table—the one over which Mrs. Cuttle presided—was to the others as a resplendent monarch to his resplendent courtiers. Here, instead of silver dishes and silver tableware, all that glistened was of gold. Forks, spoons, and baskets were incrustated with gilt. And here a vase of old ivory, echoing dreamily every tint of its pendulous white roses, supplanted the ornaments of the other tables. Here everything delighted to honor the twelve most precious members of New York society.

Last rites of all were those of the florist, and these were generally considered wrongs. The moment the florist heard Mrs. Cuttle brewing he used to tremble with fear.

“Heavens!” she cried, as late that afternoon she came down to the dining-room to inspect his handiwork. “You’re not going to leave those roses like that, are you? Why, they look



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

exactly like a bundle of wet umbrellas stuck in a rack!"

A dinner did not, by the way, present the same avenues for decoration as did a luncheon. As a rule, the offerings on each table at the evening party were merely stalks of white or yellow flowers, sufficiently high not to disturb the guests' view of one another. Often at the corner tables, however, some sculptured Greek god, wreathed about with roses and smilax, spoke wanly of an age when simplicity and joyousness combined to make poetry of any holiday. It is doubtful whether Mr. Skiley Lark or Mrs. Stephen Harcourt ever got the message.

At about half past six Woods got all the extra liveries from the big wicker baskets in a closet up-stairs. Immediately afterward, in a dressing-room below-stairs, the men donned their coats and knickerbockers. In a moment the whole reception-hall had broken out into a rash of scarlet. By half past seven footmen were lined up and the orchestra, clad in gala uniforms, had commenced to play.

As I stood there in the hallway I felt lifted to another world. Even life at The Torrents had not prepared me for the scene that awaited

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

our guests. This hall became to me, in fact, a hundred-reel picture, unfolding every spend-thrift age of the world. I felt in it the same spirit of the late Romans, the lavish Romans who feasted in purple state on flamingoes' tongues, and recked not of the doom which should come to the imperial boundaries pushed out by their vigorous ancestors; of the court of Henry the Eighth when England, reclaimed from wars with her own barons and with France, broke into that flame of pageantry which was the Field of the Cloth of Gold; of Venetian merchant princes who, having fiercely pillaged the seas for column of porphyry and tablet of bronze, sank into an apathy of pomp; and, last of all, of the wit and frivolity of Versailles, rocked in the cradle of peasants' hunger and philosophic turmoil.

I dare say that Mrs. Armington Squibbs, inured to such occasions from her girlhood, would have given much for my freshness of vision. I dare say that Mr. Quentin Van Feder Nest, gilded descendant of ancestors who had fought the Indians and reclaimed the wilderness, found no such gloomy parallel as that which I could not help drawing.

Yet the scene is one copied over and over in

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the book of society. In the great reception-hall a double file of three footmen formed an aisle from the liveried person at the door to the liveried person who, bearing a great silver tray, guarded the foot of the stairway. On each of the three landings of this same stairway, carpeted in the glowing red of a Jacqueminot rose and held by a balustrade of heavy wrought-iron, stood a footman; and at the very top there was still another. Upon this scene lights from wall and ceiling poured a steady flood of brilliance. They splashed upon the liveries; they gave a waxlike shimmer to the leaves of palms and ferns banked beneath the winding stairway, there where the musicians were installed; and they coaxed into glassy amiability the three stern old Cuttles who looked down from their gilt frames on the wall beside the stairway.

The guests at a fashionable dinner arrive in a tide that surges for about twenty minutes. None of these people is ever so lost to the sense of what a door owes him as to ring a bell. All through the course of those twenty minutes the scarlet footman at the door, noting the approach of each guest, swings back the portals into a vigilant welcome.

Mr. and Mrs. Armington Squibbs were the

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

first to come that night. At the instant they entered something went off. It was the register in the doorman's hand—a small nickel thing that enables the hostess to keep exact count of the number of people who have arrived. Miss Juanita Douglas—click—three! Mr. Monteith Robbins—click—four! It is all as cozy and informal as a Subway station.

Mr. and Mrs. Squibbs followed a schedule of getting settled observed by all the others. Immediately upon entering, Mr. Squibbs went to the right, where he found the drawing-room fitted up with racks brought by Woods and his men. A footman presided over the racks; and as Mr. Squibbs doffed his high hat and overcoat he was handed—another cozy touch—a check, for which he afterward paid perhaps half a dollar. This accomplished, he stepped boldly into the arena. Walking through the arbor of footmen, he approached the servitor holding the big silver tray. This tray held the envelopes containing the names of the allotted dinner partners and addressed to the thirty masculine guests.

It was a nervous moment for Mr. Squibbs. Was she young? Was she old? Was she fair? Was she homely? Was she a charmer or a lump?

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

No wonder he hesitated for a moment! Many a time I have seen strong men racked with emotion as they toyed thus with the petals of destiny. Often, indeed, some of the young bachelors would call me up before the dinner and ask me whom they were to take in. If the choice did not suit them they would moan piteously.

“What!” raged Monteith Robbins one day as I told him over the ‘phone the name of his partner. “Why, I’ve had to trundle her in to every dinner party this winter! Honest, I ought to be getting an annuity for my services! Come, now, Mrs. Pemberton, be a sport and give me somebody else.”

As soon as Mr. Bassanio Squibbs tried his fortune with the caskets he went up the winding stairway, past the three guardian footmen on the landings, past the three stern old Cuttles in their frames, to the place where Mrs. Squibbs awaited him. She, meantime, had gone straight up-stairs to Mrs. Cuttle’s famous red bedroom, now fitted up, like the library, with coat-racks, and had left her wraps in the care of the black-frocked and white-aproned attendant—Mrs. Cuttle’s own personal maid. The two then went together to the door of the ballroom, where Mr. and Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle, standing

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

a little back of the butler, awaited the coming of their guests.

"Mr. and Mrs. Squibbs!" pronounced Parrins, as though uttering a benediction.

Parrins, by the way, learned to know nearly everybody who came to the house. If he did not he bent forward and asked, "Name, please?" and then transmitted the syllables to Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle.

The ballroom was on the second floor of the house, and was achieved by benefit of partitions between the drawing-room and hall. Rugs had, of course, been removed for dancing, which followed the after-dinner entertainment; and the end where the thatched cottage had been set up for the little Irish operetta was curtained from view. As each guest finished the greeting to host and hostess, he passed into this area and exchanged a few chilly words with the groups therein assembled. Here each woman, until now ignorant of the award of destiny, waited to be claimed by her dinner partner. Here the guests waited for the dinner that nobody wanted.

Mrs. Cuttle wore this first night a gown of sequins, and the motion for glitter was carried by an overwhelming majority of diamonds.



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Beside her Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle, no longer able to bury himself in the shielding thickets of The Torrents, stood winterbound and frozen. He knew only too well the dreary seven weeks that stretched ahead of him.

As for me, my duties at the dinner party consisted in blowing round like a draught. I wore that night a very handsome gown given me by Mrs. Cuttle, who, by the way, supplied me with all my stately clothes for both New York and Newport. I was supposed to keep an eye on everything, to cover up lapses, to make myself agreeable, and, above all, to keep near enough to Mrs. Cuttle to release her from talking with anybody to whom she did not want to talk. The last in itself offered a career to any ambitious young person.

At about twenty minutes past eight Mrs. Cuttle began to squirm. At the same moment at every other dinner she ever gave she showed exactly the same symptoms.

“How many are there in now?” asked she of Parrins.

“Fifty-nine, madam,” responded the butler.

By what mysterious method had he, so far from the doorman and the methodical nickel register, come into possession of this fact? The

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

answer is simple: The files of footmen had provided a circuit.

"Fifty-nine in," had whispered the doorman to the man next to him, and the pregnant syllables had thus been borne onward.

"Find out who is the late one," commanded Mrs. Cuttle.

Parrins hurried down to where the man with the big silver tray solemnly bore aloft one tiny white envelope. He looked at the name on the orphan and hurried back to Mrs. Cuttle.

"Mr. Stephen Faircope," announced he.

"But he's never late! What's the matter with him?" fumed Mrs. Cuttle.

For two long minutes she stood there. Then, standing somewhat back of her in the ball-room, I saw her face change expression and I bent forward to see what had happened. It was a handsome young man, and I knew, with terror in my heart, that Mrs. Cuttle had never laid eyes on him before this moment.

"Mr. Stephen Faircope!" tolled the butler.

For once in her life Mrs. Cuttle was numbed by surprise. Without opening her mouth, she put forward her hand. Mr. Cuttle went through the same bewildered pantomime. I had made some terrible mistake!

## VII

THE MYSTERIOUS BLUE-EYED GUEST—A DINNER  
OF TWELVE COURSES IN FIFTY MINUTES—  
THE ECSTATIC MOMENT WHEN THE ORCHES-  
TRA STRIKES UP “HOME, SWEET HOME.”

WHERE had I got this young man? Had I slipped up and addressed an invitation to the Social Register of Valhalla? Certainly, whoever he was, Mr. Stephen Faircope raised the average of masculine beauty at that party. Never, indeed, shall I forget him as he stood there. He was as tall as a footman; he had eyes so blue that you could tell their color clear across the room; his chin was lifted and fearless; and his hair, brushed back from his face, had the clean sparkle of a sandy beach. Even Mrs. Cuttle stood daunted before him.

He passed into the ballroom; and the instant he was gone Mrs. Cuttle turned to me.

“What under Heaven’s name have you done?” asked she, dazedly. “That isn’t Steve Fair-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

cope any more than I am. Steve Faircope has a bald head and a pink beard."

"You told me Stephen Faircope, at the Knickerbocker Club," protested I. "I remember now there were two—a Stephen T. and a Stephen D. I suppose I picked the wrong one."

As it happened, Mr. and Mrs. Blanchlaw Stem were standing near by, and at this point the Honorable Mr. Stem interpolated:

"He's an awfully nice fellow—Faircope; young architect from the West, who's been building the Seidels' new country place for them."

"Oh, well!" said Mrs. Cuttle, always mollified by personal beauty or charm. "It's all right this time."

Meantime I had gone in to speak with the wrong Mr. Faircope. He said a few perfunctory words, and then very suddenly dashed me with a spray of quick, salty sentences:

'You're Mrs. Cuttle's social secretary, aren't you? Well, I've got something to tell you. I knew perfectly well when I got the invitation that I wasn't the Faircope you wanted. I didn't know the Cuttles any more 'n I know King Edward's poodle. It was rotten, I know;

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

but I just had to come. I'll tell you why. Can you guess?"

I shook my head.

With a little wave of triumph he showed me the card in his hand. It read, "Miss Veronica Grey."

"That's why!" he cried, unexpectedly. "It's because I just had to meet her, and I knew she was coming here to-night. I've been wanting to meet her ever since I was studying in Paris. Once over there I saw her picture in a society page from home, and I couldn't get her out of my head. She's got the most haunting eyes I ever saw. I declare, when I looked at her picture I wanted to jump right into the ocean and swim over to her and say, 'Here, lovely captive princess; here I am!' And now, by Jove! I'm actually to take her in to dinner! I'm to rescue her from the savage oysters; I'm to quell, for her sake, the raging soup. Oh, wasn't it luck that I should have actually drawn her?"

I took him over then to meet Miss Grey. He walked through the groups of people as though he were pushing away the brambles that beset his path to the captive princess. Among these gaiety-deadened faces the vision of hap-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

piness is very vivid, and I noticed that everybody turned to look at the strange young man.

Miss Veronica Grey was standing alone at the farther end of the ballroom. A cloud of gray hung from her shoulders—a cloud that seemed to lift not from any physical movement, but from the delicate tremor of her thought. She did not glance up until we were almost upon her. When she did, I saw for one moment a strange look in her eyes.

“I wish to present Mr. Stephen Faircope, Miss Grey,” said I.

But the introduction seemed an anticlimax. It was like saying, “Allow me, Mr. Siegfried, to present you to Miss Brunhild.” And I left them looking into each other’s eyes.

At half past eight the strains of the Soldiers’ Chorus from “Faust” came up to us from below. A few moments before, the caterer had assembled, with the single exception of the doorman, all the liveried persons in the hall and on the stairway.

“Here, Tom; you take this table at the upper right-hand corner, and Harry will buck you up.”

It is in this phrase that a caterer indicates passing the accessory to each course. For



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

example, Tom passed the fish, and Harry "bucked him up" with the sauce.

So rapid had been his requisition of footmen that by the time the guests, descending the broad stairway in pairs, had reached the dining-room, which lay at the left of the reception-hall, every little red livery was standing just where it ought to stand. Parrins, of course, had moved to his traditional place behind Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle's chair. As for Woods himself, he and two of his men were occupied entirely with the task of filling the wine-glasses.

I have heard of strange perversities in my life. I am familiar with the Lewis Carroll gentleman who was planning to "dye his whiskers green and always use so large a fan that they could not be seen." I know, too, about that strange old Chinese philosopher, Chang Chih-Ho, who sat for hours fishing without any bait on his hook. But I have never known anything so skilfully constructed to defeat its own ends as that dinner party, which began when Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle, on the arm of the Hon. Blanchlaw Stem, sat down at the lace-frosted, gold-embellished table in the center of this dining-room. And the occasion has been dupli-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

cated in every fashionable household of New York.

Here were the circumstances: We had spent something like fifteen hundred dollars on this dinner party. We had been three weeks preparing for its success. And now nobody was hungry. A number of the people had been involved in a similar occasion the night before. Several of the women present had finished with an enormous luncheon party, ending at half past two. Already on the faces of those present there was reflected the terrible thought that for the next seven weeks they would be obliged to go through the same listless formula of oysters, soup, fish, and fowl.

Even supposing anybody had been hungry, however, he wouldn't have had the slightest prospect of satisfaction at this dinner of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's. Every society hostess "rags" a dinner, and Mrs. Cuttle was notorious for putting through twelve courses in fifty minutes. This meant that by the time the last person on the service had got his, another course was due the first person on the service, and the food had to be resigned.

"Say," whispered Tommy Ogle once during the evening to his partner, Mrs. Armington

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Squibbs, "that fish looked awfully good as it went by me! Wish I could have caught it."

"The bite I had was certainly fine," confided Mrs. Squibbs, in return, looking with elegiac fondness after the retiring whitebait.

Even, however, if a fashionable dinner party does resolve itself into a merry-go-round, where everybody tries to grab the gold ring of an occasional bite, the preparations in the kitchen are none the less severe and painstaking. I have mentioned the fact that for three days beforehand two extra chefs, each at six dollars a day, had been at work on the party. I have not, however, gone into the details of their preparations. When I have said a few words on this subject you will realize more completely the parallel between the society dinner hostess and the old Chinese philosopher who fished without bait.

In these three days of preparation the chefs had boned all the fish; they had prepared the ice-cream and the cold dishes; they had baked the cakes; and, above all, they had evolved those fancy shapes that dazzle the eyes of the habitual diner-out. Among the wealthy there is a code that no member of the vegetable harem shall appear in public without a veil.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

As a result, every vegetable was carefully masked. For instance, one chef devoted his superior talents to making red roses out of beets, white roses out of turnips, and yellow roses out of parsnips. These were strewn lightly about the roast.

Another tenet of the dinner faith is that every shy bit of food must have its duenna of something else. The whitebait of that night, for example, appeared to each guest in a little basket of potato strips which had been dipped in very hot lard. The salad-dressing came to Elsa, like Lohengrin, in a boat. The ice-cream, which alighted for an instant before each of the guests, was served in colored molds of gelatin and cornstarch; and the candy-baskets, which sometimes supplanted silver vessels in holding the bonbons on each table, were cunningly twisted into handles of the most lifelike roses, buttercups, and daisies. Be it remembered, too, that every single item of the society dinner is prepared in the kitchen of the hostess.

More than this, too, nearly everything served that evening was cooked during the progress of the feast. To insure the perfect flavor of those little birds, they were browned while Mr. Quentin Van Feder Nest and Mrs. Armington

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Squibbs were watching from the grand stand the swift pageant of oysters, soup, and fish. Everything is done, in fact, to pretend that food is really eaten.

That evening I went down to the kitchen during the progress of the dinner. Here I found three white-clad figures scampering about from range to dumb-waiter over a floor that, with a view to unstricken celerity, had been strewn with sawdust. Here Giles, our regular chef, launched at me one frenzied look from under black eyebrows more rumpled than ever. It is something of a job to get seven hundred and eighty-four portions of food from one place to another, and Giles did not underrate it. It may be mentioned here, by the way, that everything went up from the kitchen *via* the dumb-waiter to the butler's pantry, from which it was convoyed to the guests by the twelve alert, liveried servitors.

In the matter of wine Mrs. Cuttle ignored the usual superstitions. Instead of serving sherry with the soup and white wine with the fish, she turned up at once with champagne.

"Everybody is so stupid till the champagne comes," she always said. "They're as dull as dishwater till they get a little of that."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

But, although the three wine men were dutiful in this enlivening task, although the sparkling beverage gushed forth like Old Faithful all through the course of the evening, it did not seem to raise the conversation to a very exciting pitch. How could it? Most of these people, all close-bound in the same tight little compartment of swelldom, had seen one another last night at Mrs. Sudbroke Brown's. They were going to endure one another again to-morrow night at Mrs. Armington Squibbs's. Was it any wonder that they sat glumly before the shifting panorama of food, that they fidgeted with their gold or silver knives, and looked round to see the people at the particular table where they thought they ought to be?

"Didn't Cynthia Jones look well to-day?" remarked Mrs. Squibbs to her sister-in-law, the wife, since divorced, of Carl Frederick Commadore, bearer of one of the most famous names in New York society.

Mrs. Commadore was at this time considered the most beautiful woman in New York society. Beautiful she was, too, in the way of a park. Every line of the perfect white shoulders, every contour of the face, was carefully laid out. If you are content with that type of loveliness,



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

undisturbed by a doubt, uncrossed by a shadow, here it was.

"Yes, quite," she drawled now; "but I do wish she would not receive people at a house party in those long white gloves, at the top of the stairway."

"And doesn't she give the most atrocious food at her dinners?" murmured Mr. Parry, the steel magnate, looking by the exquisite ivory vase under the pendulous white roses to where, on the other side of the table, the embankments of white shoulders were lighted with jewels like the Palisades at night. "I suppose you're going to her dinner next week?" he added, turning to Mrs. Commodore.

"Oh yes," assented the beauty, with a look of silent suffering.

Meantime the orchestra in the hall cooed "La Paloma"; and meantime Parrins, fresh from England, stood behind Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle's chair with an expression of keen disappointment.

"These people don't have many conversational powers," he remarked to me afterward. "Now in England, madam, it's a treat to stand behind the master's chair and listen to the talk that goes on."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

But there were at least two people in the room that night who enjoyed the dinner, two people who did not fidget with their knives and forks, two people who harkened to the balmy strains of "La Paloma." These were Miss Veronica Grey and Mr. Stephen Faircope. Seated there, with some other young people at the undesirable site by the butler's pantry, right near the bulky form of Mrs. Archibald Humwasp, filled now with rancor at the affront put upon her, the two were looking into each other's eyes exactly as though they had been together in some dewy glade.

"Why," cried Tommy Ogle, in a loud voice, as he peered round at them from his exalted place at the center table, "if Veronica Grey isn't actually looking at a man! First time in her life, I bet, she ever got beyond a northeast ear."

And, at the table right near him, Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey, daughter of a hundred shipchandlers and petty merchants of old New York, shuddered with apprehension. That ogre of the society matron, a poor young man, had puckered the sails of her daughter's career.

A few remarks upon the mechanical details of the dinner: In certain obscure circles of

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

society it is esteemed good form to serve a formal dinner on the same set of china. No such spirit animates the fashionable society hostess. That dinner of Mrs. Cuttle's, rising at the source of cream-colored, gold-banded china, drifted idly through red salad-plates of Sévres ware, and finally broke over into a beautiful set of deep-blue Limoges ice-cream plates, each with a hand-painted portrait of some historical personage. Then, too, there was no attempt to mobilize all the knives and forks and spoons in the household at the side of the plate. As has been mentioned, the tables were set with the three preliminary implements. After that, forks and spoons and knives were provided at need by the footmen.

After the dinner the men remained in the dining-room; and, while several footmen here passed coffee and cigarettes and liqueurs, the women were being treated to cigarettes and beverages by servitors up-stairs. When this divided ceremony had been observed, the men came up-stairs, and everybody settled down to listen to our seven-hundred-dollar operetta.

It was simple. It was guileless. But these honest faces beamed for the first time with something like joy.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Something like—yah!" gargled Mr. Quentin Van Feder Nest. "Last night—yah—at Mrs. Sudbroke Brown's, it was awful, you know!"

"That quiet you could hear a pin drop!" agreed Mr. Monteith Robbins. "Everybody was trying hard to get near the door so they could get out. I got into an awful jam myself."

Indeed, there was no doubt about it. Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle was a successful impresario. The one thing these people did not want was an opera dispensary.

But a dinner in this set has not the ordinarily limited significance. For the entertainment and the dancing which followed about one hundred or one hundred and fifty extra people were generally invited in. These invitations, which I had got out, of course, at the same time as the others, were engraved on heavy, square, gold-crested cards, and read:

MR. AND MRS. RHINEBECK CUTTLE

REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF

—————'s

COMPANY

ON THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY SECOND

AT TEN O'CLOCK

R. S. V. P.

DANCING

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

A large number thought favorably of these invitations, and perhaps two hundred people witnessed our little Irish operetta and took part in the dancing. To all of these was served, at about twelve o'clock, a buffet supper consisting of chicken croquettes, scrambled eggs and sausage, lobster and chicken salad, sandwiches, gelatin, ice-cream, cake, and champagne. But the festivities did not, according to the standards of fashionable society, last until late; and at one o'clock the two hundred guests, having made their adieus to host and hostess, escaped through the brilliant hallway, and marshaled their forces for another skirmish with gaiety on the morrow.

Who enjoyed this fifteen-hundred-dollar function? Certainly not Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle herself. For her the one ecstatic moment at any of her parties was when the orchestra struck up "Home, Sweet Home." Often in the midst of an entertainment she used to say to me:

"Oh, I'm tired of these people! Can't we make them go home?" The fact of it was that her energy was entirely constructive. She enjoyed getting up a big party. It was that which made her the great leader of her set. But when

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

it came to actual assimilation of the event, she left that to the servants. They had enjoyed themselves, those footmen and maids. To them the clotted gaiety of a winter season was a very pleasant thing.



## VIII

THE USEFUL FILLERS-IN—SOCIETY LUNCHEONS  
DESIGNED FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF WOMEN—  
UBIQUITOUS “SOCIAL CLIMBERS”—BUYING  
ONE’S WAY INTO THE SMART SET.

**M**EANTIME, even before this first dinner, I had got out the invitations to our second dinner. Here my path was less rosy. Many persons were aggrieved because they had not been asked to the first affair; and, at any rate, as the season wears on the game of “Guest, guest, who’s got the guest?” becomes an absorbing one. There are so many invitations for every night in the week that the hostess has to go out into the highways and byways.

Fortunately the highways and byways are fairly well populated. In the Social Register there are numbers of what may be termed fillers-in. These will come at any moment to cover the lapse in your party. Of such persons Mrs. Cuttle was accustomed to rely on Mrs.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Haber Dasher, with whom an invalid husband stood in the way of any responsive entertainment. Then there was Mrs. Aaron Finn Gordon, one of Mrs. Cuttle's most intimate friends. There were two brothers who were always looking wistfully through the social grating for any crumb of an invitation. And, last of all, stood that brownstone front of reliability, Miss Juanita Douglas.

Regarding this branch of social service Miss Douglas had a word of protest.

"Honestly," said she, one day toward the end of the season, "I'm tired of it! I don't mind filling in for Mrs. Cuttle, because I'm her friend; but when it comes to these other people calling me up at the last minute I must say I've had enough. And the people they've put me with—my gracious! There was old Thumbly Scrinn—eighty-five if he's a day; there was a Scandinavian baron who didn't speak any English; and once I got a man they had released from a sanatorium for the insane. Why they had released him I don't know. Well, I've got one more step—I can learn the deaf-and-dumb alphabet."

When it is considered that every hostess in the most sacred element of society is supposed

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

to give three big dinners each winter, it is not surprising that the guest market runs so short. Yet great is the resentment if any of these hostesses fails in her duty. Mrs. Joseph Clef Penmorton, for instance, annually lays great welts on the feelings of her own exclusive circle by refusing to have more than one dinner a year. Yet she continues to go about.

Upon our second dinner we did not spend nearly so much money as on our first. This time we had by way of entertainment some Highland pipers who appeared under the direction of Mrs. Falconvaux at various great establishments. The triumphant entry of these kilted and tartaned figures through the reception-hall, up the red-carpeted stairway, and round the great ballroom remains, however, one of the most vivid pictures of my life. And when, later, some braw young MacGregor danced the sword dance and the Highland fling in the center of a ring of these bonneted figures, the opera-surfeited spirits of our guests expanded touchingly. After this a barefoot dancer rang up a number of moods by aid of colored lights and veils. The dancer was not yet well established. We paid her only one hundred dollars.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Several years afterward Mrs. Cuttle bade me call up this same entertainer and ask her price for the evening.

"One thousand dollars," replied the secretary of Miss Terpsichore.

Mrs. Cuttle indicated the exact distance she wished to put between Miss Terpsichore and herself.

"After I helped make her by giving her a chance to be seen at my house!" snorted she.

It was one of those flagrant cases of ingratitude that do so much toward embittering the sweet dispositions of the wealthy.

At this second dinner Mrs. Cuttle was plainly displeased. The dinner had not gone well. A new chef was in the kitchen, and he had given out a little too much bric-à-brac in the way of food.

"Come here, Pemberton; I want to see you," she called to me as, after dinner that night, the women were having cigarettes and liqueurs in the ballroom. When she was in a bad humor she always had to have me round, like a poultice.

It was Mrs. Norman Digly whom she had thus, by calling to me, dismissed. Mrs. Digly had the reputation of getting her gowns made

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

more cheaply than any other woman in New York society. The reason was very evident.

“Lord! Why doesn’t that woman try clothes for a change!” cried she, testily. “Why, her back’s positively got goose-flesh on it! Now, Mrs. Pemberton, wasn’t that the worst dinner you ever ate? I was so ashamed I nearly went through the floor. Old Thumbly Scrinn turned to me once and said, ‘Say, Mrs. Cuttle, can’t your chef give us anything but shapes and forms?’”

Regarding our third dinner, the least said the better. It came off in the early part of February, after our guests had been subjected to nearly six weeks of gastronomic athleticism. They showed it, too. If at the first banquet people turned to the food with absolute indifference, they now turned from it with absolute distaste. Never have I seen anything like the settled loathing with which a certain young broker surveyed the roast of that evening. Only ship stewards are familiar with that look.

Between the dinners Mrs. Cuttle had a number of luncheons—one every two or three weeks. These lasted from about half past one to three, and were generally designed solely for the discipline of women. Tommy Ogle, however, was

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

now and then invited to come, and bring along his tatting.

At these luncheons we generally had from twenty-five to forty guests, and these were always seated about one large table in the center of the dining-room. For a luncheon the decorations were very different from those at the dinner. Later I shall describe in detail some of the more elaborate of such occasions. Here I shall content myself with saying that down the length of the table was placed a long, narrow mirror fenced about with gilt, standing on legs an inch in height, and reflecting obsequiously every nod and tint of the flowers that adorned the event. Then, too, we generally used a great silver *épergne* which, standing in the center of the table, adapted itself to every mood of the blooms with which it was massed.

The food at the luncheons was as diligently and artfully prepared as that at the dinner. Here is a characteristic menu: Grape-fruit or caviar; eggs in some diplomatic way; little chickens, boned; mousse of ham; hot or cold bird, with salad, and ices served in candy-boxes. Mrs. Cuttle was famous for her delicious caviar, and this delicacy was always served in a wonderful boat of ice. After the luncheon



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the women went up-stairs to the reception-room; and at three or half past three they hurried away to tea or cards, or some other festivity which should bridge over the gap until another big dinner that night.

In addition to the dinners and luncheons the fashionable hostess's program is always rounded out by a number of small dances, for which we sent out invitations on visiting-cards.

Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle were going out every night when people were not coming in. Their departure from the house was achieved with a great deal of state. At about eight o'clock, or before, two footmen were lined up at the door. If one of them was absent Mrs. Cuttle got homesick for splendor.

"What have you done with the other man?" she would ask fiercely of Parrins, who always had to be on hand to accompany the sable-muffled captain and her silk-hatted lieutenant to the carriage.

"I let him off to go to the theater," would reply Parrins.

"See that it doesn't happen again!" commanded she, generally. "I can't be sure I'm really off unless there are two."

There was one respite from the sentence of

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

perpetual feeding. This came in the week-end visit to the place on the Hudson. Every Friday afternoon during the season the great American man of affairs sought sanctuary on the five thousand acres of his country estate. On Saturday his wife and I followed him; and, although we generally brought down with us a houseful of people, he stole enough solitude and fresh air to revive him for another week of forcible feeding. I can see him now plunging over the frost-hardened roads and among the bare and lordly trees of his forests, setting his great shoulders against the northwest wind—a pathetic Antæus gaining strength for an unworthy and trivial conflict by this occasional contact with the ground.

The winter path of the fashionable hostess is beset by the social climber. Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle, in particular, suffered from the advances of such aspirants. The reason for this was because she had the reputation of having made several women. “If she happens to have a fancy for you she’ll take you up” was whispered among those spectral forms who, having acquired enough money to do things fashionably, are embarrassed only by the lack of any fashionables with whom to do them. Notable among

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

such rich people was Mrs. George Flickheimer, who had come on from a Western city to buy her way into New York society.

The ladder she used was, as is generally the case, that of charities. This is the way it was set up: Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle and Mrs. Norman Digly were interested in getting subscriptions to the Society for the Disinfection of Mouse-traps in the Homes of the Poor.

"Say," remarked Mrs. Digly, "there's Mrs. George Flickheimer. She might give one thousand if she were asked to a luncheon and two thousand if she were asked to a dinner."

"Very good," replied Mrs. Cuttle. "I'll let her in on my last dinner."

Mrs. Flickheimer paid the two thousand for her dinner, and after that the donor to the Society for the Disinfection of Mouse-traps worked hard to advance her position. It was no escalator she had chosen to get her up. Every day she bombarded Mrs. Cuttle with invitations and with gifts. One morning she would send round a huge box of orchids; the next, a twenty-five-pound box of candy. Candies and flowers, flowers and candies—the constant artillery fire was meant to bring down that key to your New York social position, an invitation to

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

one of Mrs. Cuttle's house parties. But by her very diligence she defeated her own ends.

"Tell her *no!*" she snapped, one morning when I communicated to her Mrs. Flickheimer's tenth invitation to luncheon; then, turning to me, she mused almost sadly: "Good Lord! And what does she want to get in with us for, anyway? Why, I've eaten the same cakes at old Edgely Wimbledon's for the last twenty years!"

Mrs. Cuttle had no illusions about her life-work.

## IX

SIZING UP GUESTS BELOW-STAIRS—A DOLLAR  
FOR A COCKTAIL—NINETEEN SERVANTS ON A  
MONTHLY PAY-ROLL OF \$1,500—THE BUT-  
LER'S ADHESIVE DRESS-SUIT.

MRS. RHINEBECK CUTTLE wanted her year on the cob. She did not like to cut it down into bits of the Riviera and the London season and the Paris races; and in all the years of my service with her she went to Europe only twice. Thanks, indeed, to the fact that she hated traveling, she never formed one of those groups of wealthy Americans which annually transplant their sphere of activity—gossip, clothes-buying, and entertaining—to the tufted corners of the Paris Ritz, which, wrapping themselves tightly about in a cocoon of native interests, put in time between the New York and Newport seasons.

Mrs. Cuttle saw no sense in going to some big foreign hotel to see the same people and do

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the same things provided her more comfortably by America. When, therefore, at the beginning of Lent, Mrs. Sudbroke Brown and Mrs. Norman Digly and most of her set betook themselves to other shores she stayed quietly at home. Seldom, in fact, did she ever get so far as Florida. About the middle of May she closed up her town house and we all fled to The Torrents, where we remained until the Fourth of July set off the big Newport season.

Never shall I forget the place on the Hudson as it was in those first spring days of our occupancy. On each side of the river spring held a distaff of filmy white dogwood, pierced here and there by redbud, like the swift play of a rosy finger. On each of the fine old trees of this glorious country estate had alighted a swarm of bright, glossy-green leaves. During the daytime the majestic river, curving between those blossoming banks, lay under a hail of sunlight. At night Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle and I used to watch its darkened shores for the big passenger-boat going to Albany. It was the one event of the day.

"My heavens, it's dull!" would cry Mrs. Cuttle, jumping up abruptly from the dim veranda. "Mrs. Pemberton, sit down this min-



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

ute and ask Mrs. Aaron Finn Gordon whether she can't come down next week."

"Why, Sadie, I love it!" came from the heavy, contented figure in the big chair, looking out through veils of cigar-smoke on the quiet scene.

"Of course you do!" would snap his wife. "You would like a vault — the darker and damper and lonesomer the better."

"Oh, now, Sadie!" was the big man's usual remonstrance.

Never in his life did he speak impatiently to the wife who so constantly engaged his services in the fashionable world which he hated.

When we got Mrs. Aaron Finn Gordon down for the week the outsider might have questioned the efficiency of this form of relieving dullness, for Mrs. Cuttle took to herself no more responsibility in entertaining a visitor than does the leopard at the zoo. The house and the servants and the carriages were there. She was not. Very often, indeed, when one of her house parties arrived Mrs. Cuttle was out driving or walking. Usually at ten o'clock at night she stalked off and left them to their festivities.

Nothing illustrates so well the famous hostess behind the bat as the reception she once gave Monteith Robbins when he came down for a

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

week's visit to her villa at Newport. As the young bachelor, a great friend of hers, came to the front door, Mrs. Cuttle was just going out of it. He had been abroad for five months. She had not seen him for six. These facts, however, did not by any means affect her ordinary methods. She never put out her hand. She never said, "How do you do?" or "How are you?" She just stood there and stared at him. At last:

"Are you in for luncheon, Monty?"

Even her best friends were not always Cuttle-proof. Mr. Monteith Robbins flushed to the roots of his English walking-suit.

"Why—why, I suppose I am! Doesn't it suit?"

"Oh, I don't care! I'm just going out for luncheon myself; but Mrs. Pemberton will look after you. Good-by!" And without another word she trailed off to the motor.

"Well!" said the young society man, with a grin. "Doesn't she have a nice way of committing a guest! The best wardens in the country couldn't do better than that."

Yet, though she paid absolutely no attention to anybody, Mrs. Cuttle insisted on the consciousness of having company in the house.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Our place at The Torrents was always guest-plated, and the following incident shows how little our visitors missed the fine flavor of personal hospitality:

One day during the early weeks of my service with Mrs. Cuttle there arrived at the country place a rangy young man with an eye for his own comfort. Like most of our guests, he was parched. Like most of them, too, he had no hesitation in saying so.

"Cocktail, please," said he to the butler, in that tone of authority which always indicates that a young society man is in somebody's home and not in a hotel.

Parrins went from the room, and in a moment set down before the patron of the establishment an amber-colored drink, fairly rocking with the solicitous haste of its delivery. The young man took the drink and carelessly threw out a dollar. Parrins's self-contained whiskers almost betrayed a quiver. Such generosity! He could hardly wait until he told the other servants.

A dollar for a cocktail! The news came at last to the butler's pantry and reverberated wildly about the dining-room below-stairs. A system of proportionate gratuities outlined a pleasant future for those servitors.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

After that the footman who valeted Mr. L. Dorado bestowed a loving care upon his duties. The footman who took his boots in the morning gave an impassioned luster to the leather. The chef turned off a few extra trills, and the butler saw to it that those amber-colored drinks rose frequently from their source.

Alas and alack for all these calculations! On Monday morning the rangy young man passed two footmen, the butler, and the chambermaid without so much as the quiver of a dime. That single dollar bill had been merely a bearded meteor trailing light over dull Shalott. It was all the rangy young man ever gave.

The young man who boomed into the household in this fashion is but one example of the trials and disappointments undergone by the servants of a wealthy establishment. These servants comprise a mirror reflecting back every light of splendor, every shadow of gossip, and every financial incapacity of the people they serve. If Mrs. Cuttle snubbed Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg, be it well understood that the affair received its proper amount of attention in the sitting-room below-stairs. If Mrs. Stephen Harcourt spoke indifferently to her husband, Mrs. Cuttle's maid and parlor-maid and the two head

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

footmen had their own theories regarding the situation. To the Elevated set the Subway set applied, too, its own system of appraisements. It was customary to size up each guest according to his possible gratuity.

"Who's coming down to-morrow?" I once overheard Hawkins, one of the two head footmen, ask of the butler as the two met in the butler's pantry.

"Mr. Skiley Lark, for one."

"Brings his own valet," grumbled Hawkins. "Nothing in that."

"Mr. Eustace Staringarter," added Parrins.

"And 'e's no good, either"—fretfully rubbing up a silver fork. "Last time 'e was down 'ere 'e gave me a dollar, and all those London clothes of 'is that I cleaned and pressed! 'E's the kind that thinks a footman works for the love of 'is hart—eh, wot, Parrins?"

"Well, Mr. and Mrs. George Silver—they're coming, too."

The wave follows the trough. Hawkins's broad-blown face expanded joyously.

"Now there's something like!" he cooed. "There's a gentleman! Wot did he give you last time 'e was 'ere—twenty dollars, and me five—eh? And Mrs. Silver—a lidy if ever one

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

lived! Never a time she comes 'ere but wot she runs down to the 'phone in the morning almost before Mary is doin' the livin'-room, and calls up 'er 'ome. "'Ow's the children?" she asks them at 'ome, just as sweet and hinterested as though she didn't have twenty million or so. I say, Parrins, did you hever know hany of the rest of 'em to hask about their children?"

Parrins shook his head.

"The way these people treat their young ones—it takes me!" continued the moralist, taking up another piece of silver. "They bring 'em up by a 'over—isn't that wot you call it?"

"Hover!" aspirated the more gifted Parrins.

"Well, you know wot I mean. I saw one in a window a fortnight ago—one of them wire things that supplants the warm maternal wing with the hincubator chick. 'They're 'overbred, that's wot they are—these young uns of the millionaire class."

It was conversations like this that I heard almost every day. It was conversations like this that gave me such a thorough insight into the currents that pull beneath the broad and shining level of high society. More than any other person the social secretary knows how the upper side is controlled by the lower.



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

In the Cuttle household we employed generally nineteen servants, whose monthly payroll amounted to about fifteen hundred dollars. The following list explains the situation: Butler, at eighty-five dollars a month; three footmen at fifty to sixty each; lady's maid, forty-five; chef, one hundred to one hundred and twenty-five; pastry cook, forty; chambermaid, thirty-five; parlor-maid, thirty-five; coachman, seventy-five; two grooms, fifty to sixty each; two chauffeurs, one hundred and fifty each; head laundress, thirty-five; second laundress, twenty-five; housekeeper, one hundred to one hundred and twenty-five; a useful man, forty-five, and a useful maid, twenty-five. To these must be added in the usual household of Dives a valet, commanding one hundred to one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle, however, always repudiated this luxury. To the butler fell the task of cleaning and pressing those mud-stained trousers in which he used to appear at his wife's house parties.

In this constellation the butler is the bright particular planet. A good butler is rare and is treated with much consideration. As a rule, therefore, he moves into an establishment as

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

firmly as a stationary washstand. Parrins, for example, stayed with Mrs. Cuttle up to the time of her death. He was recognized as the best butler in New York, and when freed from the Cuttle service he was fought over like Troy itself. He finally heeded the sweet wood-note of one hundred and thirty-five dollars offered him by a certain magnate, a sum that exceeded by fifty dollars the amount he got from us.

To be a good butler a man must be something of a general. He must know more than how to make a good claret cup and serve the wine in its proper cadences. It is the butler, in fact, who oversees and directs nearly all the household operations. He tells Mary, the parlor-maid, if there is any flaw in her methods; he allots the work to each footman; and when a big dinner is served he keeps a vigilant eye, not only upon the footmen, but upon all the men of the caterer.

Let us take a daily leaf from the diary of Parrins. First of all his duties was a dress suit. This garment was adhesive. He donned it before the first beams of his fried egg had shone in his eye, and he never parted with it until he went off duty at night. Thus panoplied, he went, first of all, to the butler's pantry.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Here, ranged on the table, were all the various floats in his own original morning-tray parade. He had fixed up the night before each of these, with its proper china and napery.

All that was needed now was a little food and some blossoms. Precisely at seven-twenty-three he geared up Mrs. Cuttle's tray with a dew-beaded pink rose. Promptly at seven-twenty-seven the toast and tea came up on the dumb-waiter. Punctually at seven-twenty-eight he was bearing the precious burden up the back stairs to the maid who waited outside the door of Mrs. Cuttle's room. Right here it may be mentioned that, though the footmen were intrusted with the task of carrying all other breakfast-trays, none save the butler's hands ever touched the toast and tea of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle.

"How is she this morning?" he whispered to Elise as the French maid took the tray from his hands.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the maid. "It is like taking orders from ze tornado. And ze manner in which she spik ze language Française—ah, mon Dieu!"

"The new chef said yesterday he couldn't understand her," added Parrins, laughingly.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

He was glad he was not French, was Parrins. In a wealthy household you have to work just that much harder for your money. Your mistress regards you as merely an exhaust-valve for her leaky Gallic verbs and impoverished nouns.

After he had safely ushered Mrs. Cuttle's tray up the back stairs he came to the dining-room and stood back of Mr. Cuttle's chair while the master ate his solitary breakfast of ham and eggs. When dismissed from this duty he brought me the morning's mail, the chef's menus, and asked for any orders I might have. He also got from me the key of the wine-cellar and took out as many bottles of claret and champagne and sherry as were required by the day's draught. Then, when he had placed the beverages in the desired temperature—the champagne on ice and the other wines in a nice balmy closet up-stairs—he brought back the key to me.

From this time until about eleven, when a footman relieved him, Parrins decorated the front hall. Here he answered the door and the telephone and the need for pomp. At luncheon he slipped into his groove behind the master's chair, and from this he departed only long enough to serve the wines. After that he was free until five o'clock. Promptly at this hour

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

he entered the chosen tea-arena with a crested table-cover hung in a shady nook of that genteel black arm. He was followed by a footman with a huge silver tray on which was placed the service, and the two of them stood round to await any orders that might ensue. At dinner, of course, his gifted eye and arm were again employed in the serving of the wine, and in the evening he wound his way among such guests as were present to find out just what everybody wished for his tray. During the course of the evening he ordered from the gardener the flowers with which he desired to garnish the toast and tea.

There is a whole swarm of subsidiary duties buzzing about the ears of the butler. Every day, for example, Parrins ordered the fruit. Every evening when Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle were going out he saw them to their carriage. Every day he devoted himself to the earnest task of cleaning those mud-stained trousers. In addition he kept track of a number of details and ran half a dozen different books. One of these in particular illustrates the meticulous methods of a great household. This is the silver-book.

The first time I encountered the aforesaid volume was at the opening dinner of Mrs.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Cuttle's New York season. Going into the butler's pantry, I found Parrins entering up every piece of silver destined for the party. Afterward, when the guests had all departed for the ballroom, he again counted the pieces and neatly checked them off. In fourteen years only one bit of silver was lost.

As for the three footmen—whom, by the way, Parrins always engaged—it must not be fancied that they fulfilled a destiny of mere icy prettiness. Before they got into their frozen-custard uniforms they did some real labor, and for this labor Mrs. Cuttle provided a calm livery of gray trousers and sack-coat. It is interesting to note the expense involved by these frequent costumes. To the Fifth Avenue tailor who ministers to this special form of extravagance we paid fifty-eight dollars each for the morning liveries and seventy-five for the evening ones. When, too, it is remembered that we maintained for special occasions twenty extra liveries, it will be seen that there was an investment of several thousand dollars in this one item.

To go back to the activities of the footmen: At seven o'clock one of the three men goes about and opens up the house. Afterward he carries to the cleaning-room below-stairs all the boots



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

left outside the various doors. Meantime another member of the squad dedicates himself to carrying breakfast-trays—a serious undertaking when a house party brings up the number of portable breakfasts to twenty-four.

## X

HOUSECLEANING AT THE RHINEBECK CUTTLES'—  
A DAILY ACCOMPLISHMENT IN AN IMMACU-  
LATE HOUSEHOLD—THE WORK OF INVISIBLE  
MARY—UNIFORMS OF CHAMBERMAIDS.

**H**OUSECLEANING at Mrs. Cuttle's did not attack in spasms that draw up the members of the household in semiannual convulsions. Housecleaning here was a daily accomplishment; and Mrs. Cuttle's house, whether in New York, Newport, or in the country, was perhaps the most immaculate of many immaculate households. Every day every room in the house was swept and dusted. Every Friday each rug was taken out and thoroughly beaten, and every day the silver had to be rubbed up.

For this last bit of detail we kept in the butler's pantry a huge chamois-covered buffer, the size of a small ironing-board. This was supplemented by a number of chamois-cloths and

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

about twelve brushes ranging in vigor from one row to twelve rows of bristles. They were of different shapes, too—some curved and some straight—and no ferny grot of embossment, no shaded dell of filigree, could escape the vigilance of these instruments. The silver in active use was rubbed up every day, and as each piece was finished the footman tucked it away in its long wooden tray lined with purple velvet. As for the big pieces, each of these had a separate bag of chamois in which it was kept until called forth by the pibroch of the dinner fray.

Not only, either, was the cleaning confined to articles in daily service; every day some section of the reserve force was attacked. In this way all these extra pieces got at least one polishing a week.

“By hookey! I’m sorry for a speck of dust in this house!” confided Hawkins to Mary, the parlor-maid, as she was arranging flowers at the table near by. “Why, it ’asn’t got the chance of a kitten’s tail with a three-year-old! There, darn you!” And he addressed the great crested silver platter he was cleaning. “It’s lullaby to you, my pretty baby, for a week.” And he tied it up ferociously in its great chamois bag.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

A word right here of the butler's pantry. This room, which I have already described as adjoining the dining-room, from which it was cut off by only a large and ornate screen, was in reality the switchboard of the whole establishment. In the town house the butler's pantry was two stories high, and you went up a stairway to reach its topmost treasures of china and silver. In the other houses it was merely a large room lined with shelves and closets in which were kept all the tableware of the household. Here dishes were washed, flowers arranged, trays polished, and silver cleaned. And here took place some of the most dramatic episodes of the servant world.

While Hawkins was busy with the silver, Henry, another footman, had gone to work in the cleaning-room below-stairs. This scene requires also a few words of explanation. It was fitted up with ironing-boards, pressing-tables, all sorts of electric irons and all kinds of stretchers. Here in the evening were brought the men's suits and neckties gathered up from the various rooms, and here during the morning of a house party there were often six or seven valets and footmen engaged in their respective duties. A librettist anxious to get away from hussars,

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

tennis-boys and village maidens might take advantage of the tense situation.

"Hi, there! Move up a little, won't you?" cries Hopkins, the valet of Mr. Skiley Lark, bearing before him, like a battle-cry, a pair of dove-colored trousers.

"Say," cries the valet of Mr. Quentin Van Feder Nest, rudely jostled by this rival firm, "how many pairs are you goin' to do for that gentleman? 'E's a regular centipede, I believe."

"Hookey!" cried Hopkins. "Why, this ain't much! 'E just came back from London with twenty new suits. And 'ave you seen those new pyjamas of his?"

"You mean them baby-blue silk affairs, with the forget-me-nots embroidered on 'em? Yes; I saw 'em as I passed through the 'all last evening, all laid out on the blue-maple bed. Sweet! says I to myself; I'd like to be man to a lady like that—a lady that dresses in divided skirts of blue cloud."

"It don't 'urt my manly feelin's," replies Hopkins, bearing the dove-colored ones to the desired battle-field. "'E's got some pale rose-colored ones embroidered in buds, and some lavender ones with lilacs on 'em. And I bet

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

there isn't a gentleman that comes 'ere that has finer toilet things than Mr. Lark's."

"Mr. Van Nest doesn't go in for baubles like that. 'E's rich enough so he doesn't 'ave to show people just 'ow rich 'e is," answers the loyal retainer of Mr. Van Nest.

About this time the dignified figure of Parrins entered the room. A subdued little wave of merriment rose and broke at his feet at sight of the trousers swung over his arm.

"'Ere's the man that really works!" cries one of the valets. "'E don't have to just make believe 'e's cleaning—do you, Parrins?"

"They do look unusually bad; that's quite so," says Parrins, giving a concerned look at the burden over his arm.

"They say 'e looked simply a sight when 'e came in to luncheon yesterday," commented one of the valets; "and 'Awkins says the madam was simply furious. Never to get in until after the fish was served and then to look something like a cross between a mud-pie and a Newfoundland dog! And she yells out at 'im so everybody can 'ear: 'Oh, Rhinebeck, stop telling that long story! Can't you see that Mrs. Digly's bored to death with you?'"

It will be seen from such conversations as



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

this how clearly Mrs. Cuttle's set was refracted below-stairs.

But to return to the footmen: By eleven o'clock, that fateful hour when Mrs. Cuttle always descended for her morning drive or walk, two of the men were supposed to be bound in their red covers and on guard at the front door. As a matter of fact, the front door of the fashionable home is always guarded like a shrine. I shall never forget Mrs. Cuttle's scorn for a friend of hers who permitted the pure ether of this region to be contaminated by a perambulator.

"My heavens!" she cried. "Maudie Towne actually allows her grandchild's nurse to wheel a baby-carriage down her front steps. A baby-carriage, mind you! And she comes from one of the best old families in New York!"

Every other afternoon each footman was permitted to take off; but, to counterbalance this, one evening out of every three during the social seasons each man had to stay up and await the return of Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle. For his long and solitary vigil a couch was fitted up in a closet in the front hall. When, in the early morning hours, he finally was roused to admit his employers, it is doubtful which looked more

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

bowed down by weight of society—the sleepy-eyed servant or his sleepy-eyed master.

Any one entering for the first time the household of the great is sure to be impressed by the absolute secrecy of all operations. Every domestic action is absolutely macadamized. No guest ever sees a servant at his task; and Aphrodite herself, descending in a cloud to assist her Trojan favorites, was not more clandestine than these nineteen household servants of the Cuttle mansion.

Of this fact the parlor-maid is a good example. Mary was an important factor in the spotlessness of the home. As soon as she had finished her breakfast she swept and cleaned the down-stairs rooms. She arranged all the flowers for living-room, reception-room, and library. She served my meals in my sitting-room. She and one of the footmen washed the breakfast-dishes. And in the afternoon, when everybody had gone up-stairs, she repaired the ravages of tea and a day's occupancy. Yet not a soul in the family ever saw her at it.

One morning, for example, when Mrs. George Silver, commemorated by one of our footmen for taking an interest in her own children, came down very early, as was her custom, to call

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

up her home in Lakewood, she found Mary sweeping the living-room. Before she had a chance to be overcome by the sight, however, Mary had been absorbed. No beauty cream could have done it more neatly.

In the daily routine of the Cuttle household flowers played a heavy rôle. From the great gardens and conservatories of the estate on the Hudson we took for decoration an annual levy of six thousand dollars. Once we used up in a single month seven hundred dollars' worth of bloom. Every morning while we were at The Torrents a great wagon-load of fresh flowers used to be brought to the rear door, and every morning while we were in town similar quantities were sent by express. It is illustrative of the careful bookkeeping done by the wealthy that all these flowers were recorded and appraised. Each day I got from the overseer of the country estate an itemized price-list of the flowers used that day. After I had O. K.'d this list I forwarded it at once to Mr. Cuttle's financial secretary.

When these decorations arrived they were taken at once to the butler's pantry and laid on a long table. From the varied assortment Parrins took, first of all, those which went with

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

his breakfast-trays. Next the parlor-maid selected those adapted for her domain—always big, showy flowers, like chrysanthemums and American beauties and hollyhocks. As for the shyer blooms, these were reserved by the chambermaid for the up-stairs rooms. Every single room in both the town and country house was decorated freshly every day, and it was only in Newport that we got so far from our base of supplies as to be compelled to forego this item. Even the servants' rooms at the other two places were touched by this general conflagration of bloom, and each day the useful maid trimmed them up with the flowers that had been used in the family's rooms the day before.

As to the chambermaid, her duties always came up thickly. In order to see why, let us glance at those rooms over which she presided. Each bed was fitted out with lace-bordered, lace-crested sheets and pillow-cases, which had to be changed every morning. The blankets were bound deeply with satin, and this binding, together with the eiderdown quilt laid at the foot of the bed, was in a color to match the furnishings of the room. Beside each bed stood a table with a water-bottle and china—also deferring in color to the room—and in front of

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

each window there was a basket filled with growing plants.

In the morning the maid swept and dusted each of these rooms; and in the evening, while the family and guests were at dinner, she turned back those lace-frosted sheets, she filled the water-bottle in each room, and she took to a table in the hall all the vases of fresh flowers. When getting ready for a house party this maid had a particularly exacting time. Let us say, for example, that the blue-maple room was the subject of her operations.

First of all, the cake of soap, which she provided here, had to be in tune. The wrapper of one of those winsome little cakes of French violet would no more have betrayed a trusting set of blue-maple furniture by coming out in a pink wrapper than would *Ivanhoe* have worn the colors of a strange lady. Such accessories we ordered by the gross, and they came variously in green, blue, rose, and violet habiliments.

One day, when I first came to Mrs. Cuttle's, I made a blunder about this detail. I went after the maid and took all the wrappers off the soap provided for the guest-rooms. Mrs. Cuttle came after me and the storm came after Mrs. Cuttle.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"What!" said she, drenching me with her loud voice. "You aren't taking off the paper, are you? Why, Skiley Lark would think I had used this soap before!"

Not only, either, was the soap a delicate echo of the room color. When Mr. Skiley Lark's valet laid out on the blue-maple bed of the guest-room assigned to him those blue-silk pyjamas, embroidered in forget-me-nots, he found in diplomatic proximity a wash-rag that looked as though somebody had picked it from the meadows. The towels, too, were embroidered up like an Italian sky. No jarring accents rent the deep, composed, blue stillness of Mr. Skiley Lark's morning slumbers. The chambermaid saw to it, too, that every other bedroom in the house observed the same proprieties of color.

There were certain things we always bought in quantities. One of these was soap and the other was bromides. As soon as the guests at our house parties left, the remains of their soap were placed in the servants' rooms. There were no remains of the bromides.

Before swinging downward from up-stairs to kitchen, a word must be said of the maids' uniforms. Like those of the footmen, these



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

were of morning and evening varieties. When Mary was clearing up the living-room in the morning and when Olga was putting on those fresh, lacy sheets, they both wore costumes of white. In the evening, however, when the two of them were chatting together down in the servants' sitting-room, black frocks, with white collars and cuffs and aprons, had taken the place of their former attire. In some establishments the maids are permitted the privilege of wearing evening clothes when through with their duties. The personal maid of Mrs. Millicent Gamble, for example, often appeared in décolleté. Mrs. Cuttle, however, tolerated no such approximation.

## XI

THE PERTURBED LIFE OF THE CHEF IN HIS  
AUGUST DOMAIN—TWELVE HUNDRED POUNDS  
OF ICE EACH DAY—THE LILIES THAT LIVED  
—A HUNDRED-CENTIMETER HOUSEKEEPER.

OF the nineteen columns that upheld the Cuttle portico of splendor, the chef was the heaviest Doric worker of them all. The butler had time for wondering why his employers did not improve their conversational powers; the footmen got every other afternoon away from their gaudy liveries; the chambermaid and parlor-maid were given a free afternoon. As for Giles, however, the only times I ever saw this poor creature in the open was sometimes, in Newport, when he took a plunge under the breakers. As a rule, he never had a chance to get brown on any one side.

The domain of this person was august. On one side of the kitchen was the giant range, and

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

on the other were shelves where hung all the various utensils. Adjoining this was a big cooling-room, in the center of which a long, marble-topped table provided a place for making all the pastry. Here, instead of one ice-box, there existed a whole battery. One was for the meat, another for the fish, another for the cream and butter. These huge ice-boxes took during the summer a toll of twelve hundred pounds of ice a day; and under their glacial sway came the vegetables, heaped each morning upon the marble-topped table, and the row after row of shelves containing all the cold dishes that had been prepared.

In these two rooms the chef led a perturbed life. Consider, please, the demands upon his energy: He got ready all the breakfast-trays, Mr. Cuttle's breakfast and my own. This tandem of breakfasts led him gently up to luncheon, and when luncheon was over he had to begin work on the tea and wiches that usually included those with hot bacon, those with minced chicken, and those with salad. The evening meal of the household always required hours of preparation, and after that Giles was often called upon to get up some refreshments for the evening. Altogether, it was no wonder

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

that he could never count upon a good, grass-grown, corn-fed evening of his own.

All the marketing, with the exception of the fruit and wine, was done by this functionary; and, as he got a commission on everything, he never saw any particular reason for economy. As a result, I found Mrs. Cuttle, when I first went to her, racked by that universal problem, "How shall I get down my bills?"

"I want you to look after each item, Mrs. Pemberton," said she, setting her eyebrows in the direction of the kitchen. "It's perfectly ridiculous—our meat bill for the past month."

I immediately took up the matter with the autocrat of the kitchen.

"See here, Giles," said I. "How do you explain this butcher's bill of seven hundred dollars? It seems to me entirely too large for one month. We haven't had much company, and this doesn't take in all the fowls we've had from the estate."

Giles moved his eyebrows, but not his next month's butcher's bill. This was as large as ever, and finally I was obliged to discharge him.

The chef vied with Mrs. Cuttle in shaking our whole household like a terrier. Everybody was afraid of him; and his assistant, the pastry-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

cook, trembled at his slightest word. When it came to a conflict between Giles and the mistress of the establishment we all felt something empire-shaking about the scene.

Mrs. Cuttle's objections to his handiwork were taken from many points. One day, for example, when she had a house-party luncheon, she said to the butler:

"Send that salad down to the chef and tell him it hasn't enough mustard."

Parrins put the unsatisfactory item on the dumb-waiter and sent the message down. Quick as a flash came back:

"Tell ze madam she has!"

Nor would it have made the slightest difference to Giles if Mrs. Cuttle had been tapping the wires.

Somebody once asked me why it was that Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle was such a great leader.

"She's rude," commented this questioner; "she snubs people right and left. She's not beautiful, and she's not particularly wealthy. Why, then, does everybody cringe to her so?"

To this I replied: "She has exactly what most of her set do not have. She has force and she has honesty; but, above all, she believes in herself. Mohammed, founding a religion, was never more

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

sure of himself than Mrs. Cuttle when giving a big Newport entertainment. Napoleon himself never willed victory into a tired army more successfully than she can make an Italian garden grow out of weeds. She believes always that she can do a thing—the most impossible thing—and she always does it.”

This complete conquest of what psychologists call the “fear thought” was very apparent in the way she directed her house. One wilting hot day, for example, she said to the gardener:

“Take up those shrubs by the marble bench on the walk. I’m tired of them and I want you to plant some lilies there.”

The gardener protested that they would not live if planted on such a day.

“Nonsense!” retorted she, imperious as Zenobia directing her galleys. “I say they will live.” And they did.

One of her famous contests with Giles illustrated the same trait in her character. For a long time she had been complaining about the mayonnaise, and these complaints, registered through me, provoked always the same retorts from the kitchen. At last Mrs. Cuttle resolved to give an object-lesson in food preparation.

“Bring the things to me,” she ordered one



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

morning from the rose-colored glens of her bedroom at The Torrents. "I'm going to show that chef how to make mayonnaise."

A few moments later Hawkins brought her the ingredients. Together with Parrins and myself, he stood by then and watched her defy every tradition concerning the construction of mayonnaise. First, she slammed down her foundation; and then, instead of those laborious and stuttering drops of oil with which we generally coax into being the reluctant dressing, she poured in a cupful at a time.

Parrins almost made a gesture of entreaty. I gasped aloud. Even Popocatepetl gave a neurasthenic little bark.

"It's all right," said Mrs. Cuttle, boldly stirring in those potations of oil. "You'll see."

With anybody else that dish would have been a failure, but sometime later there emerged from Mrs. Cuttle's hands a bowl of mayonnaise as stiff as a school-girl. Mrs. Cuttle had fairly believed that mayonnaise into being.

"There!" said she, with a magnificent gesture. "Take that to Giles and tell him if he wants to know anything more about cooking he should come in and let me show him."

Mrs. Cuttle was a good hundred-centimeter

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

housekeeper. Though the servants in a great household are so well trained that they go automatically, Mrs. Cuttle went round to inspect the house about every two weeks. Of her approach I would always give due warning.

"Put on your clean apron and cap, Giles," I would command. "Mrs. Cuttle is looking in on you to-day."

Nor was this inspection by any means a perfunctory one. From her ancestors Mrs. Cuttle had inherited an indomitable cleanliness. Everything about her had to be spick-and-span, and she could have detected a cobweb from an aeroplane. More than this, she wanted everybody in her house to be good to look at.

Once, for instance, in making her dreaded round of the house, she caught sight of one of the laundresses.

"Heavens! she's homely!" she said to me, fiercely. "Discharge her at once."

I tried to present to her the fact that a strong arm is worth more to a linen shirt than a sculptured nose; but all in vain. Her standards of beauty never drooped before any foe of reason.

Laundresses, however, were not by any means maintained for their profiles. Consider the problems that had to be met by this branch of

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the domestic service: From the hundred table-cloths of our great linen-closets we took a change of napery for each meal. For the servants' dining-room we required a change every other day. And every sun brought clean sheets for all the beds. Add to these hundreds of napkins and these dozens of sheets and table-cloths, the personal laundry of family and of servants, and you will understand why two laundresses worked every day of the week, and why each of our establishments incorporated great rooms for washing, drying, and ironing the clothes.

There were two wash - days a week in the household — Monday and Saturday. Then, while the first laundress dedicated herself to the family clothes, the second laundress took in hand the cleanliness of the servants. Upon this second laundress falls, indeed, much of the heavy work done in this department, for it is she who comes to the laundries every morning before breakfast and starts the fires. She, the useful man and the useful maid were the most poorly paid members of the household. They seldom came in for any of the gratuities lavished upon the other servants, and the women received only twenty-five dollars a month each for their services.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

It is a proverb, of course, that the servants of the great must be waited upon by other servants. Trace back the stream of Cuttle pomp, with its eddies of liveried footmen, to its source in the ground, and you found the chef's assistant, the useful maid and the useful man. The chef's assistant did all the cooking for the servants. The useful maid waited on them at table, made their beds and cleaned all their rooms. The useful man made himself generally useful to the butler and his lordly footmen.

If ever, indeed, a man lived up to his title this forty-five-dollar useful man of the Cuttle establishment lived up to his. Before the dew had dried on that rosebud born to blush seen on Tommy Ogle's breakfast-tray, this humble servitor had vaulted from his bed and was cleaning the front premises. Every morning he scrubbed the verandas and every piece of furniture thereon. When this work was over, he did a little valeting for the servants. Then he cleaned the dining-room. Afterward he and the third footman washed that huge flotilla of dishes put out by each meal—except, of course, at one of Mrs. Cuttle's big luncheons or dinners, when the caterer brought a squad of dish-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

washers. In addition, he handled all the baggage of the guests and family. For this last service he was seldom, if ever, tipped; and once I heard him voice proper indignation at the uneven distribution of the world's gratuities.

"These people seem to think a trunk is a kind of natural talent of mine—like a he-phant," said he, steaming under the weight of Mr. Skiley Lark's voluble wardrobe. "Wonder how often I've carried this yere little box round with me, and not a cent for it!"

## XII

THE SERVANTS' MEALS — ETIQUETTE BELOW-STAIRS—SUBMARINE SNOBBERY—THE PANGS OF CORNED BEEF—HOT CAKES OF ICE—WHY ONE GUEST'S CLOTHES WERE NOT PRESSED.

THE servants' meals were served in the following order: Breakfast at seven, luncheon at twelve, and dinner at six. Between these meals interposed tea. At ten o'clock in the morning and at three in the afternoon every Harriet and James swoons for tea, like a member of Parliament; and at such stated hours you saw every servant in the Cuttle house trooping down to the below-stairs dining-room to exchange the latest news of high society over a cup of this dynamic beverage.

Need it be said that the etiquette below-stairs is shaded as carefully as that of Mrs. Cuttle's own circle? Fancy, for instance, the blight upon the lady's maid's whole career if she were ever asked to sit down at a table with



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the laundresses or the grooms or the useful man! And could Mrs. Archibald Humwasp, seated at the table by the pantry door for one of Mrs. Cuttle's big dinners, possibly experience a more racking pang than that which would have shot through one of the two head footmen if he had ever been called upon to sit beside his inferior brother, the third footman? The hierarchy of rank is here well defined. No Mede or Persian can ever disturb the tremendous tradition that at the first table of the dining-room below-stairs there must go none other than the butler, the two head footmen, the lady's maid, the parlor-maid, the chauffeurs, and the valet.

The scene of this submarine snobbery was only a little more elaborate than that in which the King of Greece and some of the simpler European monarchs take their daily repasts.

Every day the table was set with the flowers bequeathed from the master's table of the day before; its dishes were dainty ones of blue china, and every other day saw a change of napery.

Henry and Hawkins and Parrins and Elise did not come in for the high-strung Gallic dishes served up-stairs. Nevertheless, their food was extremely good and well cooked. Each

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

morning brought, as regularly as even a British sun can deliver them, ham, bacon and eggs, marmalade and tea. Every Sunday the English rite of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding was administered. The only scar upon the feelings of everybody was the corned beef and cabbage which Mrs. Cuttle insisted upon serving once a week both up-stairs and down-stairs, and which represented to her one of the few vacations from the feverish sauces of the French chef.

Observe the difference in attitude; while upstairs Mrs. Cuttle was smacking her lips over the luxury of cabbage, down-stairs Mrs. Cuttle's servants were all grumbling over its hardships!

"Well," said Hawkins, moodily, as one day he sat down before the base, low-born dish, "I see we're up against it again."

"Yes," said Henry, his brother footman, jabbing a contemptuous fork into the portion allotted to him. "If it wasn't that I was hungry as a goat I wouldn't touch the bloomin' stuff; and I don't know which is worse—the pangs of hunger or the pangs of corned beef and cabbage—eh, Parrins?"

At this moment the French maid, rather be-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

lated, entered the room and, at sight of the general affliction, tossed her head like a dainty lap-dog.

"I take ze bread and booter!" said she, firmly.

The second table of the below-stairs dining-room was occupied by the third footman, the chambermaids, the grooms, the laundresses, the useful maid, and the useful man. As for the chef, he and his assistant, the pastry-cook, had their meals at a table in the kitchen. Their time for this localized enjoyment was, however, very limited; and Parrins used to remark that Giles always sat on a griddle for fear he would overstay his time.

The range of pleasures of the Subway set is by no means limited. Their sitting-room below-stairs, where they used to gather in the evenings after their work, was gay with red carpet, with chintz curtains, and with magazines. Here they played cards and talked over the affairs of the day, and here they indulged in more literature than most of the people whom they served ever took time for. Every servant was permitted to borrow one volume a week from the up-stairs library; and I, as librarian, had a chance to observe the amazing range of their interest.

"I think I'll take a Victor 'Ugo this evening,"

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

remarked to me one evening the moralist, Hawkins. "'E's a great old boy, 'e is. Kind of tikes you out of yourself, madam." And he went off with *The Man Who Laughs*.

Particularly vivid was their interest in any book that visualized Mrs. Cuttle's own set. One very famous novel of American life, which was said to have had some of its chapters set in the gorgeous living-room of The Torrents, was thumbed almost to extinction by the eager fingers down-stairs. And Mrs. Armington Squibbs and Mrs. Norman Digly and Tommy Ogle themselves were not more successful in identifying the characters of this novel than were Parrins and Hawkins.

The members of the below-stairs set were very sensitive to any sally upon their peculiarities. A book of essays written by one of Mrs. Cuttle's friends well illustrates this point. The book in question contained a little description of the departure of a guest from a fashionable household, which read somewhat as follows: "When it comes time for you to take your leave from that little house party of Mrs. Dives, the servants somehow manage to get to the front hall before you. Those liveried cakes of ice, who stand before the bleak and whistling winds

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

of the front door, are waiting for you. The butler is waiting for you. And no ring of the bell, no bronchial affection of the telephone, near by, could possibly budge one of them away from the expectation of that warm Gulf Stream of currency that is expected to flow from your pocket to theirs."

We tried to keep this bit of literature away from the servants, but it was impossible. They read it and they resented it; and the next time the author of the unfortunate paragraph came to *The Torrents* he was made to feel in a dozen different ways the mistake he had made in his choice of a subject.

"Cakes of hicc, are we?" whispered Hawkins, who knew his Harriet Beecher Stowe as well as he knew his Victor Hugo, to the brother footman guarding the door at the time of the author's next visit. "Well, Eliza won't get across on 'em this time. If 'is necktie and suits get more than the wink of an iron from me, my name's not 'Awkins."

Much has been said about the tips given to the servants in a great establishment, but not nearly so much has been said as has been given. The meteoric young gentleman who flashed through a visit with that one brilliant

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

dollar is, in fact, a very rare instance. Most of our other guests were neither so lucky nor so daring; and it's safe to say that both the butler and the chef collected forty or fifty dollars every time one of those gloomy house parties assembled under our roof. The amount generally given by a man guest was five dollars to the butler, five to the chef, and one dollar to each footman. Some people there were, however, who far outreached these limits. When, for instance, Mr. and Mrs. George Silver crossed our threshold, it cost them almost as much as to cross the continent, for they invariably paid twenty dollars to the butler, twenty to the chef, twenty to the chambermaid, and five dollars to each footman.

As I have already indicated by quotations from the butler's pantry, the Silvers were always awaited in a spirit of deep appreciation. So, too, was a gentleman without a valet, for in this case Parrins assigned one of the footmen to valet the bereft gentleman. As a rule, the recompense for this service was anything from one dollar to five, but sometimes the market took an upward swing. Monteith Robbins, for example, once paid the record sum of twenty dollars to the footman who had nursed his



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

twenty new London suits through a severe attack of house party.

It must not be thought that the Subway set draws exclusively upon the upper set for interest and amusement. Breaking away from the spectral domain where the gowns of Mrs. Norman Digly and the actions of Mrs. Cuttle supplied the only conversational banquet, the servants often broke out into a party of their own. One year, for instance, the Cuttle servants gave a fancy-dress ball in the coach-house of The Torrents, to which were invited the servants of the neighboring country houses. The costumes were all rented in town, and each represented a handsome gratuity.

I have not yet mentioned the detail of opening and closing the various houses; yet this required the employment of a vast domestic mechanism, and we never either entered or departed from the New York mansion without a cost of two hundred and fifty dollars. When May took Mrs. Cuttle away from New York to the country, an upholsterer came in and took away all the carpets and rugs. The fur rugs were placed with a furrier, and the draperies throughout the house were cleaned and put away on poles in closets on the top floor. Every

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

ornament in the house was cleaned by the maids and relegated to these same closets. Furniture was brushed, sown with bags of camphor, and covered with linen. And until such time as Newport demanded its presence the bulk of the silver was deposited in chests with the most famous jeweler of the city. All except the lower part of the house was then boarded up and left in the care of a cook and a laundress.

When we returned to town in December the servants went before us and attended to the opening up of the house. As for *The Torrents*, it was kept open all the year in the hands of a butler and a cook, who, when the household again took possession, were reduced, respectively, to the positions of footman and maid.

Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle usually spent about twenty thousand dollars a year on her clothes, a sum that did not come out of the ten thousand dollars a month which she devoted to her household expenses. Now, as the flowering dogwood stretched about her on every side and the leaves of the fine old trees trembled in the sunlight, Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle was making her own response to the spring. She was assembling the clothes for her Newport campaign. These included from twelve to fourteen new evening

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

gowns, eight or ten afternoon ones, about six tailored suits, several dozen new hats, and numbers of matching shoes, stockings, and parasols.

Such a wardrobe as this needed careful nursing, and Elise, Mrs. Cuttle's maid, spent little time away from her charge. At night when Mrs. Cuttle came back from ball or rout, Elise was waiting in her own little bedroom for the bell that should summon her to the fray. After assisting her mistress to undress, she gathered up frock, wrap, and slippers, and took them to a cleaning-room especially designed for this repair-work.

In the morning, just a little before half past seven, she came to Mrs. Cuttle's room and opened it up. Then she received the breakfast-tray from the hands of the butler.

While Mrs. Cuttle was eating her breakfast Elise laid out her clothes for the day. Then she took the discarded tray to the hall. Then, while Mrs. Cuttle was divided between my hands and those of the masseuse and the hair-dresser, the maid flew back to the repair-room. When she returned she assisted Mrs. Cuttle to make her morning toilet and laid out the suit for the day. This suit was never by any chance introduced until the last moment—a speck of

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

dust might have settled, perhaps, on its immaculate folds. Never, indeed, did any hospital have a more aseptic atmosphere than the dressing-room of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle. The moment she took off any garment there was an ambulance call for its removal. The very idea that people could be so sunk in nature as to wear a suit twice without being cleaned and pressed never once occurred to her.

All this spring, while we waited for the chrysalis of Newport, Mrs. Cuttle never renounced her claim on the house party. We had them all through May and June; and, though the general exodus to Europe rendered the pursuit of game even more fatiguing than usual, in the end our hardy pioneer constitutions won, and we rounded up a few guests. During these parties I made a discovery that the people in Mrs. Cuttle's set are the most hard up in the world.

One evening, when I had been thrown into the jaws of a house party, Tommy Ogle strolled over to where Mrs. Cuttle and I were talking together. His evening suit had a pensive air, and his fat face steamed in gloom.

"What's the matter, Tommy?" asked Mrs. Cuttle. "You're getting to be an awful bore.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

You haven't put a funny word in the slot since you've been here."

Tommy sat down in a dejected heap. "Oh, bills, bills, bills!" he moaned. "Nothing but bills! And I've been having such a row with Tillie. She wouldn't give me one cent over my allowance. And there's nothing I don't owe."

Mrs. Cuttle looked at him sternly. "Why don't you get to work, anyway?" asked she.

Tommy looked dazed. "Work!" he echoed, weakly. "What work can I do? I never was brought up to do anything. What shall I get at?" Then suddenly something happened to him. Looking over to the corner where his wife sat, he cried out, with a quick, sharp catch in his voice: "Tillie, get up this minute! You're just ruining those sequins by sitting on them."

To see a dress used roughly was a great emotional crisis in Tommy's life. His tender nature blazed out fiercely at the thought.

The next day it was raining and everybody sat round looking like children who have the mumps on Christmas Day.

"I believe the devils think I got it to rain!" said Mrs. Cuttle. "What shall I do with them?"

Then, looking through the window, she caught sight of three figures standing in the dripping

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

downpour. They were her husband, Miss Veronica Grey, and Mr. Stephen Faircope.

"Well, would you look at that!" she gasped. "He's showing those trees off again, telling those people all their pet names and Latin names and fool names—as though anybody cared what a tree was called!"

I was moving away, but she called me back.

"By the way, Pemberton," said she, "we won't dare to have that young Faircope down here again."

"Why?" asked I, despairingly.

There was little altruistic sentiment about me, I admit. I merely felt keenly the removal of any one alternate in my list of bachelor victims for house parties.

"Well, Mamie Grey is in an awful stew about things. She says he's been trailing round after Veronica ever since you made that mistake in inviting him to that dinner. She says he's simply crazy about her, and she's afraid Veronica is about him."

"But what of it?"

"What of it?" cried Mrs. Cuttle. "Ten thousand a year, and no family!"

The leave-taking of that house party is stamped on my mind because it illustrates so



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

well a widely divergent sense of values. As I went from my sitting-room to the reception-hall that morning I came suddenly upon the figures of Miss Veronica Grey and Mr. Stephen Faircope. The man was looking into those gray eyes as though bidding them an eternal farewell. And, taking advantage of this absorption, Mr. Eustace Staringarter, one of the notoriously poor young bachelors of society, was stocking his pockets with cigars and cigarettes from the silver boxes that stood under the dogwood blossoms on the marble table.

Mr. Eustace Staringarter, like so many of his set, saw no sense in farewells to other people's tobacco.

### XIII

INNER SECRETS OF NEWPORT — THE AWFUL  
POWER OF "OLD SAM"—VERANDA BATHING  
—\$1,400 A MONTH TO THE BUTCHER—LIMP-  
ING THROUGH A SEASON ON \$8,000 A MONTH.

"IN summer," remarked a young German diplomat to Mrs. Cuttle, as he sat beside her on the veranda of her bath-house at Bailey's Beach, "the cry is always *thalassa*."

"What?" snorted Mrs. Cuttle, looking down to where Mrs. Norman Digby in a bathing-suit short as a Norwegian day was now toying with the ocean.

"It is the Greek word for ocean—what the soldiers of Xenophon said when they again saw the seas," explained the young diplomat in the embarrassment that comes from overrating your listener's education. It was quite clear that Mrs. Cuttle's mind could not be engaged with past history. Her thoughts, indeed, fairly ticked out loud.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Wonder why that woman doesn't wear something sometime! Where did Undine Plutenberg get her fright of a frock? There's that dreadful Dorcum girl angling after Quentin Van Feder Nest again! Wonder if the Carl Frederick Commodores are going to take me on their yachting trip this week-end!"

It was a typical Newport thought-cage, and I dare say that many other women seated on the verandas of that long line of bath-houses which flank Bailey's Beach were scampering about in the same mental circle.

On this July morning the hot summer sun met its appointed duties with unusual care and accuracy. Splinters of light fell into the blue sea; half a dozen sail-boats courtesied prettily to the waters, and on the sandy beach wave after wave laid its slow fan of lacy foam. To such a scene as this the July sun was quite accustomed. It had copied it thousands of times on the Atlantic coast.

But Bailey's Beach! Ah! that was something different. For this particular spot was a patent of American nobility. It was guarded by a Cerberus known as "Old Sam," who for forty years had held the sacred trust of keeping away from this inclosure all who were not clothed in

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the majesty of wealth and social position. "Old Sam" knew every regular habitu   of Newport by sight, and if he did not recognize you nothing save a card from some member of the Newport Association could get you by. Without such guaranty you were compelled to seek the public beach seven miles thence.

The distinguishing feature at Bailey's Beach is a long line of bath-houses which might more properly be called veranda houses. The original function is, indeed, quite eclipsed by those piazzas which accommodate the fastidious souls who like their breath of gossip by the shores of the stately sea. Yet even as bath-houses proper the specimens here are highly developed. Very different from those wells of darkness where most of us grope with our clammy garments are the Bailey's Beach houses, with their gaily curtained windows, their mirrors and pincushions and dressing-tables and cretonne-covered furniture and shower-baths. Of such structures each millionaire cottager had one, and some—Mrs. Wiltshire Hobbs, for example—presided over a caucus of three.

Very few of the women at Newport are radical enough to go in bathing. The customary thing to do is to hop on the veranda of your bathing-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

house and there sun the latest gowns and the latest scandal. Of course in late years everybody has adopted a creed of simpler dressing. At the morning haunts of Newport you now find most women attired in blazers and sport skirts. When I first went with Mrs. Cuttle, however, all this was very different. On this July morning, for example, Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle wore a lingerie frock of Irish lace thrown into relief by an underslip of pale yellow. Her competitors on the neighboring verandas vied with her in chiffon and lace.

The ritual of a Newport day starts with a visit to the Casino at eleven o'clock in the morning. Here, after they have looked at the band and the tennis play, the fashionable set take their motors to the next station in the day's march of gossip—Bailey's Beach. These commodious cars generally pick up groups of the poverty-stricken young diplomats who form the backbone of bachelorhood during the summer season. On this particular day a long line of motors was drawn up beyond the entrance gate in full view of that gay veranda where Mrs. Cuttle and the young German diplomat met on their lumpy and uneven ground of intercourse. In this column the claret color of Mrs. Cuttle's car, the

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

dark green of Mrs. Simpson Heinmann's, and the bright red of Mrs. Sheridan Boomkins's beamed conspicuously.

Into the sea at Bailey's Beach juts the picturesque "Old Castle," and down to the cliffs right back of the bathing-houses slope the rear grounds of several of the notable villas. Crooking its elbows there at the side of the inclosure, the famous Cliff Walk, which winds from Bailey's Beach to the public beach seven miles farther down, commands the eye to more of these sloping terraces. The constant iterations of millionaire villas, the gay little bath-houses with their chattering groups, the long line of glossy motors, the figures on the sand—all these took the famous rendezvous well out of the epic sphere into that of the poster. You completely forgot that these waves which rolled on in unnoticed majesty had borne, some nine hundred years before, the daring Norsemen to this selfsame spot.

We had come to Newport on the 2d of July. We stayed until about the middle of September. Between these dates Mrs. Cuttle and I led a busy life. Two weeks before we arrived, in fact, invitations had gone out for our first big dinner on the 8th of July; and we were sending



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

out crested invitations to crested parties all the time we were there.

Compared to even the winter season, the months at Newport were overshadowing. Newport was the climax of Mrs. Cuttle's year. Here she gave her big balls. Here she battled for the title of social leader, and here she spent, as did everybody else, fabulous sums of money.

Before going farther I am going to jot down some of the items which raged on our monthly bills at the princely resort. Our butcher bills came to fourteen hundred dollars a month, and our fowl bills often reached three hundred. We brought to Newport always at least a thousand dollars' worth of wine. We spent on electric lights two hundred dollars a month. We always employed extra servants—a second parlor-maid, another chambermaid, and a third chauffeur. In one of Mrs. Cuttle's famous fancy-dress balls we invested perhaps twelve thousand dollars. Florists' bills, musicians' bills, and caterers' bills were generally doubled at Newport; and it is safe to say that no hostess can even limp through a Newport season on less than eight thousand a month.

The fact of it is that the tradespeople who come to the Rhode Island resort have just as

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

much fun taking in money as do their patrons in spending it. The butcher sits under the cross-bones and exchanges a cutlet for a cutlass. The fowl-man holds you up sixty cents for every pound of chicken. Tradesmen settle down to piracy, and though time and again the thrifty millionaires have sought to boycott the tradespeople by establishing markets of their own, they have never been successful. A dollar probably does less work in Newport than in any other part of the globe.

I cannot forego the privilege of the chronicler—I must describe this spot to which my duties now took me. Probably not since the gleaming temples of the Acropolis sprang from the mud huts of ancient Athens has there ever been such a dramatic contrast of magnificence with poverty as here in this fashionable watering-place. Down in the business part of the town the narrow streets are filled with funny old houses, with cheap shops and moving-picture shows through which lurch always groups of loose-jointed sailors. This part of the town reminds you that Newport once vied with New York in commercial importance, and you can see across the haze of years the eighteenth-century trader looking down Gravesend Bay for the cargoes

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

bringing him sugar from the West Indies or slaves from Africa.

Back of the town, slightly on an eminence, rises the twelve-mile avenue of unflinching magnificence which gives Newport all its present meaning. Some one has said that everything has been done for this place which can be done by money and poor taste. To some extent this is true. As I drove for the first time down Bellevue Avenue into Ocean Avenue I saw now a villa of graystone inflamed at each corner with bunions of red granite, then an eighteen-eighty model trying to gulp down some indigestible turrets, and next a gummy row of pillars stuck on to a house that never needed a pillar. As a rule, indeed, the villas themselves are tasteless. It is only the grounds, plumed with hydrangeas and sparkling with fountains, that help you take Bellevue Avenue.

Among the architectural stutterings of the celebrated thoroughfare—the French châteaux turning into Tudors and the Tudors suddenly embracing the faith of the mid-Victorian—Mrs. Cuttle's villa was very arresting. What she herself thought of it is illustrated by the reply she once made to a foreign prince congratulating her on her “magnificent villa at Newport.”

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Magnificent nothing!" responded she. "It's only a plain old weatherboard house."

This "old weatherboard house" was so immaculate that it made you think of a square Anglo-Indian official dressed from pith helmet to shoes all in snowy white. Inside, it could be thrown into one for all great entertainments. Simple as it was, it provided an admirable equipment for the great Newport general.

As soon as Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle came to Newport she started to work churning up the season. Entering the Casino the morning after her arrival, she found the famous haunt on Bellevue Avenue already filled with white-clad figures. The band which the fashionable set engages to decorate this scene had started up the march from "Aïda," and to this warlike measure the leader entered with firm and resolute step. At her coming the white groups parted like foam before a giant prow.

"Hello!" said she to Mrs. Wiltshire Hobbs. "How are you? When are you going to give something? I'm having a little dance Friday night and a luncheon next Monday. We must get things started, you know."

"Yes, I know," replied Mrs. Wiltshire Hobbs, shepherd of the flock of three bath-houses. This

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

morning Mrs. Hobbs was gowned as determinedly in lace as Mrs. Cuttle herself. "I'm a little late this year, but I'm giving a few little things week after next."

"Well," said Mrs. Cuttle, "we mustn't let things get slow."

A little farther on she met Mrs. Sudbroke Brown and Mrs. Simpson Heinmann, and before the morning was over every little foundling day of the Newport season had been found a home of gaiety. Mrs. Cuttle saw to that.

During this first morning you heard from every group something of Madame Schlafknabe's dinner the next night.

"Are you going to-morrow night?" asked Mrs. Sudbroke Brown of Mrs. Cuttle.

"Oh, I'll have to go through with it. She says dreadful things about me; but then she says dreadful things about most people. No use minding her," and Mrs. Cuttle's voice filtered through the soft strains of "Aïda" with all the ability of one used to the hardship of talking above expensive music.

For years and years Madame Schlafknabe's Fourth of July dinner has opened the Newport season. On this date the gilded descendants of those stiff-necked patriots who signed the

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Declaration of Independence always bowed their necks to a power stronger than they—the great tyrant of Being Seen in Society. That night as the guests rose from silver-weighted tables fireworks were put off from the rear of many of the villas. But the rockets shooting out over Cliff Walk and dropping their sudden fingers of fire into the dark sea could have no message for Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle and her friends. The land of the free was a mere phrase to these serfs of high society.

Madame Schlafknabe was there at the Casino that first morning. An elderly woman, she was one of those whose title of *grande dame* is earned easily by a pompadour of white hair and an arrogant profile. As Mrs. Cuttle entered upon the scene, Madame Schlafknabe was talking in a group with Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg. The moment that the latter caught sight of the heavy-prowed figure in white lace a sudden light appeared in her eyes. She and Madame Schlafknabe ceased talking for a moment, but the lull was a dangerous one for Mrs. Cuttle. You could tell that by the rapid musketry of undertones which followed.

Mrs. Cuttle did not maintain her title of social leader at Newport without frequent con-



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

flicts. There were many determined to seize from her the scepter, and among all these contestants none was stronger than Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg. In the first place, she was far richer than Mrs. Cuttle. In the second place, her villa exceeded Mrs. Cuttle's in splendor. Also she was young and very beautiful.

Of this latter fact there could be no doubt. Seeing her now for the first time—she had been in mourning throughout the previous winter—I could not take my eyes off the tall figure in its waves of sea-green chiffon washing up to where the bronze head tilted under a hat of darker green. She was like a rush tipped with sunlight and she seemed always to be gently swaying.

## XIV

COMBATS OVER VISITING NOBLEMEN—THE STIRRING INCIDENT OF PRINCE GUSTAVUS OF SWEDEN—A SHY AND SLEEPY PRINCE—THROWING IN A FEW DEMOCRATIC PLEASURES.

SOME years later Mrs. Cuttle and Mrs. Plutenberg did not speak at all. This morning, however, the flint of bitter rivalry drew forth its usual society spark of a pleasant word. The two contestants shook hands.

"How well you are looking, Mrs. Cuttle," said Mrs. Plutenberg, pleasantly. In reply Mrs. Cuttle filed down the rough edges of her voice. It is the same the world over. There are Mrs. Cuttles and Mrs. Plutengbergs drawn up thus every day on the banks of the Wabash and by the snow-capped mountains of Puget Sound.

The greatest combats of these two were waged over visiting noblemen. It must be remembered that Newport is the haunt of these coveted gentlemen. Schools of them have come

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

leaping over the water and sunned themselves on the gilded rocks of the millionaire resort.

Mrs. Plutenberg was a great fisherman, but Mrs. Cuttle also used the net to advantage. In the course of those fourteen years I spent with the latter, both went through various vicissitudes in their favorite out-of-doors pursuit. Sometimes Mrs. Cuttle came away with the catch and sometimes Mrs. Plutenberg's long eyes were privileged to that side-glance of accomplished revenge. In describing their rivalry I shall not confine myself to one season. In order to get the essence of Newport I shall give a composite picture of the years.

The greatest of Mrs. Cuttle's triumphs is centered about the visit of a Swedish prince whom I shall call here Prince Gustavus. One morning, when news was going about the busy Newport fisheries that this whale of nobility had been sighted, I found Mrs. Cuttle in a state of great excitement. Even Popocatepetl was affected by it, and, looking up at me from out the corners of his eyes, his mouth nervously opened and shut.

"Well, Mrs. Pembie," shouted Mrs. Cuttle, "we've landed him."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

“Good!” said I. “How did you do it?”

Ah, how did she? The answer to that question is localized perhaps in the person of one Mrs. Grimper, a candidate for high society from the Middle West. Mrs. Grimper was a friend of one of those interested in promoting the Swedish prince. She was not by any means a friend of Mrs. Cuttle’s, yet for one week after Prince Gustavus had honored our shores Mrs. Cuttle entertained the lady from the West at her villa by the sea; and Newport, wise old Newport used to the give-and-take of society, made its own shrewd connotations. It suspected the reason why Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle had come away with the great catch.

When it was all settled, I was ordered to write at once to the Swedish legation in Washington to find out exactly what etiquette went with a Scandinavian prince. The answers were explicit, and when, ten days afterward, the princely yacht steamed into the harbor we knew exactly what to do. First of all, Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle, in company with Mr. Philip Martinet, the prince’s impresario, and Mr. Tittle Dormouse, head of another house which was to share in the privilege of the royal entertainment, went down to the yacht to leave their cards. Exactly one

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

hour afterward the prince came to the Cuttle house to return the call.

But it is written that no member of the foreign nobility shall humble himself by coming direct to a front door. He must be met some distance from the house. When, therefore, Hawkins and Henry caught sight of the crested motor winding up the driveway they gave notice to Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle. As for Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle, standing just inside the doorway, her face was flushed with excitement. It was the fisherman's great moment—when he feels the giant catch pulling on the line.

One instant more and the fish was drawn in. Fairly looping himself to get out of the motor, Prince Gustavus of the royal house of Sweden stood before his captors. He was a bargain in nobility, that Gustavus. Seldom do you get so much of a prince at one time, for he stood six feet three, and his intense thinness gave him a pulled-out effect.

"Hookey!" whispered Hawkins to Henry. "'E ought to have a reel to wind 'isself on."

"Looks like a regular straw, that's a fact," agreed Henry.

Later on, in the butler's pantry, Hawkins and Henry had more to say. On nearer view, in

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

fact, the Scandinavian prince afforded some food for comment. When he got up close we saw that he was extremely young—not more than twenty-three—very gawky, and that he was scared to death. All this was emphasized by a sailor's uniform that looked as though it had caught cold in the sleeves. Not the natty blue thing in which the musical-comedy star comes out and sings about "The ocean blue" and "I'll be true"! This garment of the prince's seemed to say that it had tasted the salt waves.

When Mrs. Cuttle offered her hand the prince was much more embarrassed than she. After he had said a few constrained words he glanced about him helplessly. It was quite apparent that he was prostrated by the gusty cordiality of our hall.

And small wonder! For ten days before we had been busy whipping the cream of civility. The chef had practised up dishes proportioned evenly in "j's" and salt, and had laid his ice-cream palette with the blue and yellow of Sweden. The florist had massed the great entrance-hall with yellow allamandas and blue and yellow hydrangeas, and over the doorway were now draped two great silken flags of Sweden which we had had made especially for



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the occasion. The only self-restraint exercised by Mrs. Cuttle was in omitting a group to do Swedish calisthenics.

Immediately after his arrival Prince Gustavus was taken to the conservatory for tea. From this he was released very shortly and escorted solemnly down to his motor by Mr. Cuttle. When he got to the door of this equipage the scared young nobleman happened to look back at the house, and his eyes fell upon Olga and Freda, our two Scandinavian maids, now waving Swedish flags from two of the upper windows. A look of real pleasure—the first that had visited that blond face during the call—made him look quite handsome, and he waved gaily in response.

His respite from entertainment was, however, very short, for that same night Mrs. Cuttle had arranged in his honor a big dinner. When, at half past eight, the royal guest entered on the scene he found the house strung from pillar to pillar of its wide verandas with necklaces of colored electric lights. From the fairy-like glow of the grounds Prince Gustavus stepped in among the yellow and blue decorations of the hall.

This hall was now thrown into one with the adjoining drawing-room and dining-room, and

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

in this liberal space had already assembled ninety of the flakiest members of the upper crust of America. It was a proud moment for Mrs. Cuttle.

Not so, however, for Prince Gustavus! He quite evidently had a bad time of it. Tossed from one group to another, his eyes grew blood-shot and glassy from looking down among millions of dollars' worth of diamonds. When several old ladies—the stately Madame Schlattknabe, for one—tottered to their feet to greet him his cup of misery seemed full.

“Oh, please, madam!” he nervously besought one octogenarian; “I beg of you, will you not be seated?”

But the aged dowager—her ancestor's name had appeared with a fine twirl on that famous document abolishing royalty—had made up her mind to get the full use of her lungs to breathe in a prince.

“Oh, I could not think of it, your Highness,” she protested, looking soulfully at that gilt button on the princely diaphragm with which her eyes were just about on a level.

At the dinner that evening there were sixty guests in the dining-room and thirty more placed at tables in the glass-inclosed balcony.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

The royal guest sat, of course, on the right of Mrs. Cuttle at the great gold-laden center-table. Prince of a court renowned for its frugal and simple life, son of a people where the lower middle classes read Strindberg and Swedenborg and Selma Lagerlöf, I very much doubt if the shy young man in the shabby blue uniform had met much gold plate in his life. Certain I am that he had never seen so much food mobilized at one meal. What did he think of Newport—Prince Gustavus? I wondered; and the answer came to me in something once told me by a Swedish professor.

“In Stockholm, when I was a boy,” said he, “you could ask any boy in the street who was the richest man in the country, and he probably would not know. What he would know was the name of the man who had just got one of the big university prizes.”

Certain it was, at any rate, that the royal guest's opinions retained their original clarity. He had never drunk anything alcoholic in his life, he told us, and as the champagne purred into Mrs. Cuttle's glass he looked out over an empty goblet. He succeeded in keeping all his faculties for the escape which he made immediately after dinner.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

This opening dinner was on Thursday, and from that moment until the Tuesday morning when his yacht steamed away Newport exercised with the shy young man as though he were a medicine-ball. On Friday night the Tittle Dormouses entertained him at dinner. On Saturday night he was passed to the rival team of Plutenbergs. A luncheon at the Dormouses' on Saturday and another at our house on Sunday reduced the royal victim to a state of collapse. At the Dormouse luncheon he gave up. On this occasion, just after the meal was finished, the hunted young man came up to his hostess and whispered: "I am so sleepy, Mrs. Dormouse, that I can't stay awake any longer. Might I ask you—would you be so good—as to get me away some place for a moment's rest?" Even a Newport-scarred veteran, accustomed to stay up until all hours in the morning, may be touched by such artlessness. To remove six-feet-three of prince without ever disturbing the curious groups about him was, however, a very difficult game of jackstraws. Yet Mrs. Dormouse played it well. A moment later a footman had smuggled the prince up the back stairs into a bedroom of rose and gray. And for two hours Prince Gustavus, stretched at

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

full length in his shabby blue uniform, shook the delicate Adam bed with a sturdy Scandinavian snore.

"Where is the prince?" twittered one after another of the royalty-famished guests. But it was not until some weeks afterward that they heard the true story. In the mean while Prince Gustavus, revived by his slumbers, had escaped *via* the back stairway to his yacht.

On Monday night the prince got a chance to express his views. This evening he invited to his yacht those most prominently identified with the movement for introducing royalty to magnificence. The result was one of the most scathing rebukes ever administered to Newport, for the dinner was such as might appear any Sunday on the table of a small shopkeeper; and it was served, not by liveried flunkies, but by the prince's own barefoot sailors.

There can be no doubt, however, that Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle enjoyed that artless meal. To her the prince had offered an appetizer. He had given her his arm to dinner, and as the bare feet of those sailors flapped about on the scrubbed bare floors of the yacht dining-room she had the satisfaction of seeing Undine Pluten-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

berg's eyes rolling covetously to her seat on the right of the prince.

Mrs. Cuttle's triumph was all the more intense because it had been by no means certain upon whom the prince's choice would fall. Of course Mrs. Cuttle had been promised a first option on him; but then there was always Undine Plutenberg to be reckoned with. And as for Mrs. Tittle Dormouse, she had entertained the royal visitor firmly throughout his five days' stay. No wonder, therefore, that Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle bobbed along so triumphantly on the blue-and-gilt arm of the sailor prince!

But you cannot keep a free-born Swedish prince down, even in Newport. It may gratify the feelings of the tender-hearted to know that the visitor twined the hard brick wall of entertainment with a few democratic pleasures. He attended one night a big political ball, and on this occasion his choice of partners, it is said, was not dictated by the Social Register.

"You may believe it or not," said Hawkins to Henry the night after the political ball, "but Freda told me 'is 'Ighness—"

"'E's 'igh all right enough," tittered Henry.

"That 'is 'Ighness hasked Holga for two



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

dances," resumed Hawkins, rubbing on the crested vegetable-platter, "and that 'e went spinnin' about in one of them foolish, tipsy waltzes that the foreigners do, lookin' for all the world like a clothes-pole in the wind. And that 'appy and bright!"

"I never did howld to them foreign noble-men," replied the scandalized Henry, whose zone of consecration did not extend beyond Buckingham Palace and the English peerage.

## XV

THE STOLEN GRAND DUKE—TOMMY OGLE TO  
THE RESCUE — UNDULATING UNDINE SPOILS  
A PARTY—HOW MRS. HARKINSON BUZZER  
FELL FROM A NEWPORT PEAK.

**B**UT the Swedish prince's capture was somewhat offset in Mrs. Cuttle's career by the incident of the Grand Duke Ammonia of Russia. This nobleman was very unlike the simple young sailor prince of Sweden. He came to the big Newport hotel with liveried outriders, with much manner, and with two rapiers of black mustache thrusting out at the unarmed air. He took the splendid homage of American society much as he might a missionary bake proffered him by the king of the Cannibal Islands.

In his honor Mrs. Cuttle had arranged a big dinner of seventy-five guests. The Grand Duke Ammonia, however, had arranged something different. On the day before the dinner I

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

brought to Mrs. Cuttle a formal declination from the titled sojourner. A week before Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg had sent us her regrets. Until the very morning of the dinner party, however, Mrs. Cuttle felt no sinister connection between these two regrets.

Bringing in her mail this particular morning, I found the gray furniture the only calm thing about the place. Elise, the maid, was laying out her mistress's clean clothes and Mrs. Cuttle was laying out Elise. As for Popocatepetl, this register of moods was lying in an extreme corner of the room. Here his shoe-button eyes, slipped fearfully over to the corners, advised him of any immediate necessity for change of position.

"Have you seen it?" cried Mrs. Cuttle, storming up and down the room in her pink negligée.

"Seen what?"

"Why, this!" And she picked from the bed a newspaper already crushed with rage. "That wretched Undine Plutenberg has got the grand duke away. Oh, I might have known she had a hand in his sending regrets."

I picked up the morning paper, glanced over the society notes, and there learned that on

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

this night, which he had first promised to Mrs. Cuttle, the Grand Duke Ammonia was to be the guest of honor at a dinner given by Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg at her splendid home. No doubt about it! The rival Izaak Walton of Newport had come away with the catch.

"The very idea of that woman getting him away! I'll be the laughing-stock of this whole place!"

Her predictions, however, were not fulfilled. When the seventy-five guests arrived that night they found in the seat of the absent grand duke a tall figure clad in an ermine robe, wearing a gilt crown upon its head, and carrying for scepter a shimmering egg-beater. It was Tommy Ogle, clad in an evening wrap of Mrs. Simpson Heinmann's.

"Achooski!" sneezed the great court jester of American society. "Quite chilly this evening!" And he pulled about him more jealously the snowy mantle. "Yes, yes, quite like my own dear Siberia."

A roar of laughter burst from the assembled guests, but Tommy Ogle gravely continued his part.

"Lovely mustaches," he commented, whirling hypothetical adornments. "Yes, I often use

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

them to file my nails. Besides, they are so warm, and the air on the Neva is so *veree*, *veree* cold. But nothing like the Casino to-morrow morning when I meet the famous Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle face to face. Ah, what chilblains I shall then have!"

"How do you like our American women?" shouted some one through the enfolding mirth.

"Charming—I find them so. Particularly the lovely Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg. No, thank you"—this to the servitor bringing him his fish—"I do not care for it that way. We always eat ours raw in Moscow."

Breakers of laughter dashed over the tables at this last sally.

"Silence!" cried Tommy Ogle in his high falsetto, beating on the table with the egg-beater. "By order of his Majesty, the Czar."

It was with sallies like this that the gifted comedian kept the dinner in a roar. Never was the dreary operation of eating food which nobody wanted so pleasantly performed. As for Hawkins and Henry and Parrins, no one single event ever did more to destroy a long and honorable record for composure.

"Hookey! I'm glad Old Sables didn't come!"

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

choked Hawkins, sending a peal down the dumb-waiter.

So, in fact, was everybody else. Compared to this, the stately dinner adorned by the real grand duke must have been a very dull affair.

By early the next morning the news of the great joke had been carried into every nook and cranny of Newport. It reached Undine Plutenberg sipping her morning tea amid rose-colored curtains. It got by those rasping black mustachios to the Grand Duke Ammonia. "Heavens!" wondered all Newport. "How will Mrs. Cuttle and the grand duke treat each other this morning when they meet at the Casino?" In order to see, everybody got there early, and no money ever had to be returned by the box-office.

It is said, indeed, that the air at that particular spot on Bellevue Avenue never quite healed from those conflicting glances. Mrs. Cuttle's look would have penetrated several layers of Russian sable. The Grand Duke Ammonia's would have worn down one of Mrs. Cuttle's big diamonds. They cut each other dead.

After this there was also a decided chill between the two doughty anglers. Indeed, the whole span of Newport seasons was enlivened by



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the differences between these two ladies. Hostilities reached their climax at a big dinner of Mrs. Cuttle's.

On this occasion Mr. Horatius Plutenberg entered on time and told Mrs. Cuttle not to wait with the dinner. His wife, he explained, had been detained and would not be there for a few minutes. In spite of this, Mrs. Cuttle, fuming beside me, endured the hardship of putting off the dinner. Even at a quarter to nine undulating Undine had not yet appeared. At nine o'clock, when everybody was cantering through the fish, Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle commenced to look as though she had prickly heat. Mr. Horatius Plutenberg, too, was squirming with mental nettle-rash.

"Wait a moment, if you please," said the uncomfortable husband at last. "I'll go out and call up Undine."

"She says that she has been detained," reported he, coming back from the telephone in the hall, "but she'll be here in a few moments."

Even a society moment, though, generally takes less time for incubation. It was, in fact, exactly quarter to ten when the beautiful Undine slipped by the lonely Henry at the front

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

door and, sailing into the roomful of people, advanced upon her enemy. Not one word of apology or regret did she utter. Nobody there failed to get the impression that there was purpose in her lateness.

"Really, all I want is an ice and some champagne," drawled she.

It was not by any means all that Mrs. Cuttle wanted to give her. If we had been living in those cheerful days of Old Salem I am quite sure that she would have run to get a faggot to put under the feet of the bewitching woman in sea-green chiffon. Yet the great leader showed self-control. There was not even a stitch in her voice as she rose and said, "Oh, please let me get you something else."

The dénouement of this story is not known. It probably took place when the tortured husband and his wife met alone in the windy corners of their summer palace.

Newport is the chosen peak of the social climber. Here every year come dozens of people who have worked their way cautiously down to the great summer resort *via* the more temperate social climes of Bar Harbor and Narragansett Pier. Here "getting in" is a desperate agony, where you can hear the ropes

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

creak and see the athletes using their prehensile great toe.

A few of these aspirants finally do arrive. Some do it by a political dicker, such as is illustrated by the supposed connection between the Swedish prince and Mrs. Grimper. Others are pulled up on the shoulders of sons and daughters who have attended fashionable schools. All of the successful are probably born either in New York or in the South, for it is an axiom that the money of the unknown Westerner gets him no funicular at Newport.

Even, however, when the candidates reach the glittering ice-fields at the top they do so only with great hardships. Nobody except people with plates of iron where their feelings ought to be can ever survive the snubs given them as they pick their way among the dangerous crevasses of society. Of such hardy mountaineers Mrs. Harkinson Buzzer was an excellent example.

Mrs. Buzzer had been a poor girl somewhere in New England, but her husband had made a fortune and through artful investments in certain coupon-bearing society charities they had steamed up a few pegs and were now looking down at the panting figures in the valley. Mrs.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Cuttle always invited the Buzzers to one of those "big messes" at Newport which include everybody; and, though she always received them with a glance that said, plain as day, "I've got to have you and I'm having you," Mrs. Harkinson Buzzer held pluckily on to the ropes.

One evening at Newport Mrs. Cuttle, standing beside her husband and in front of Parrins, wanted to know if everybody was in. No, they were not, Parrins informed her. The clicker in the doorman's hand had registered only 118 out of the 120.

"Who are the extra two?" stormed Mrs. Cuttle.

Parrins had anticipated this query by looking at the envelopes still lying on the big silver tray held by the footman at the bottom of the stairs.

"Mr. Harkinson Buzzer and Mr. Kenneth Gadzooks," replied he.

Just at this moment Mrs. Harkinson Buzzer happened to be standing near by. Covered with confusion, she now stepped forward.

"Why, Mrs. Cuttle," she gasped, "do you mean to say you didn't get my note?"

"What note?" snorted the sultana.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Why, I told my social secretary two weeks ago to write and say that Mr. Buzzer and our guest, Mr. Gadzooks, would be unable to come."

Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle gave her one blistering look. Then, within hearing of everybody, she said, "There are some things we should not leave to a social secretary, but I suppose, Mrs. Buzzer, that you do not know that." Having delivered this blow, Mrs. Cuttle turned her square back to the offending climber.

Did Mrs. Buzzer march indignantly from the room? Did she decline in the future every invitation proffered her by Mrs. Cuttle? Not at all. It does not pay to be so tactless in Newport. Immediately after getting this rebuke, in fact, she sat down and wrote to Mrs. Cuttle a letter expressing her regret at her "unforgivable carelessness."

Another full-armored contestant in the Newport sport was Eloise Dorcum. She was a pretty girl who had gone to one of those fashionable New York schools where they powder the mind with French verbs and genteel observances. In this way she had met the daughters of those families to which her parents had long been aspiring. It was the same old story of society. The daughters invited her to their little affairs,

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

their luncheons and unpretentious parties, and gradually the more obdurate adult circles broke down, not only for her, but for her family.

Even this, however, did not content the passion of the Dorcums for high altitudes. In order to get full benefit of that pure ether dwelling about the banquets which no one wishes to eat and the house parties which everybody hates, they decided to marry Eloise to any of three or four rich young bachelors. Their efforts, finally successful, racked Newport for several seasons.

One morning as Mrs. Cuttle, looking very much like King Canute, was sitting on her veranda throne at Bailey's Beach she was approached by Mrs. Blinker Van Feder Nest. "Just look!" cried the latter. "He's with her again—that awful Dorcum girl! Oh, what shall I do!"

To be the mother of a Fifth Avenue mansion, a yacht, and some millions of unearned increment is a trying task. Mrs. Blinker Van Feder Nest, following the figures of her son Quentin and that gay Tyrolean, Eloise Dorcum, as, attired in bathing-suits, they played about the rim of water below, shivered with apprehension.

Mrs. Cuttle gazed out at the ocean as though



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

just about to order it to bring her wrap. Suddenly she turned.

"That girl needs a good snubbing," said she. "She'd have never got where she is to-day if she hadn't worn shin-guards and toe-protectors. My! the bumps those people have had! But I tell you what I'll do, Elsie; I'll never ask her to another one of my things this season."

"Oh, that would be fine, Sadie!" breathed the tender mother of the Fifth Avenue mansion. "Natalie Commodore has promised me she won't have her, either. And Eliza Tittle Dormouse has been so sweet and sympathetic."

The next morning Mrs. Cuttle, in making out the list for her next "big mess," carefully omitted the name of Eloise Dorcum.

"I'm sure I don't know why I should bother myself, though," she remarked to me. "Quentin's got a head as flaky as breakfast food. Somebody will be sure to eat it up one of these days, and I suppose it might just as well be Eloise Dorcum."

As it happened, however, Eloise did not get this nourishing bit of breakfast food. The boycott system was efficient, and the following season the center of maternal anxiety was Bailey Bellew Heinmann. Again Mrs. Cuttle

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

and other members of the hallowed circles on top pledged themselves to the suppression of Eloise. In this case they were again successful. Yet the common meeting-grounds of Newport—Bailey's Beach and the Casino—those two shrines visited each morning by the pious pilgrims of society, coupled with the endurance of Miss Eloise Dorcum, at last contributed to a Dorcum holiday. The sure-footed young climber carried off a husband almost as rich and socially prominent as the objects of her first attentions.

## XVI

DODGING THE INELIGIBLES—THE GREAT LEAGUE  
FOR PROTECTING DAUGHTERS FROM NEEDY  
YOUNG MEN—THE BREAD-LINE OF NEWPORT  
—ONE “VON” WHO ENTERTAINED.

IN the good old days it was customary for the irate parents to follow the eloping pair in a rattling post-chaise. In Newport the post-chaise is occupied by the girl and the solicitous parent. The lover follows as best he may. When, for example, Amoretta Jenkins took a fancy to Mr. Skiley Lark, a bachelor whose wealth was outweighed by certain infirmities, her parents carried her off on a long cruise in their yacht *Abelard*. When two years afterward she lifted her head sufficiently from this malady to note the charms of a threadbare artist, they whisked her off to Europe. Not until she finally deposited her affections in the strong-box of several millions was she permitted to take the dangerous air of Newport.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

It was in keeping with such defensive measures that soon after Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey had implored Mrs. Cuttle to omit Stephen Faircope from her parties she took the double precaution of sending Veronica abroad. Throughout the London season the girl had been visiting English friends, and from time to time had come reports of her social successes. More than once the rumor ran through Newport that Veronica Grey was engaged to the Viscount Sheepskin, whose mother she had visited through the month of July.

One day in August, during my first season at Newport, Parrins brought me the card of Mr. Stephen Faircope. I think I have omitted to say that the calls of high society are carefully sterilized. Nobody ever dreams of calling in person. Good form demands merely the deposit of your card with the footman at the door. These disinfected visits should properly occur within a week of the entertainment which they acknowledge. Sunday afternoon is a favored time for such ceremonies, and either at New York or Newport there was always a procession of young men solemnly checking in their bits of pasteboard along the route of great houses.

For this reason a personal call from Mr.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Faircope could not fail to electrify me. I was still more surprised by his appearance. Since that house party in May, when I last saw him, he had grown thinner, his blue eyes now looked tired and haggard, and though the clean sweep of blond hair was gallant as ever, the head itself drooped forward.

“Well,” he said, seating himself on a tiny green chair in my sitting-room, “she’s coming back.”

There was no Ciceronian preamble about this young man. He was as given to digging up a subject by the roots as Mrs. Cuttle herself.

“I suppose you think it’s funny—my coming in on you like this. But I’ve got to talk to somebody. It’s just too much. You don’t mind?” And he looked at me appealingly from under his straight black brows.

I shook my head.

“Well, you see, I haven’t seen her since that time at Mrs. Cuttle’s when that stuffy little Eustace Staringarter kept slipping in the cigars; and this is all I’ve heard from her.” With that he pulled from his pocket two letters. “Look at them,” he exclaimed, ruefully. “You’d think they had been run over by two freight-trains and a typhoon. Lord! how I’ve

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

read those letters! I get up in the middle of the night to go over them, and once I got so hungry for them that I tore into a department-store waiting-room and read them among the Jersey babies and the hat-buying husbands. Yet what do they say? Nothing! They might have been written to her great-aunt. Yet here I go twisting and turning, trying to think when she says 'Riding in the Row' that she means 'I'm thinking of you.' Did you ever in your life hear of such a double-jointed idiot?"

I had, but just at that moment I did not press the similarity.

For a moment the young man looked down at those worn and eye-beaten missives. "Do you think—do you think she might?" he asked, staring up at me from under those haggard young brows.

"Why don't you ask her?" said I.

"Ask her! Haven't I done that thousands of times with my eyes? And it seemed to me often as if she were saying back, 'Yes, yes, yes' with hers. But I can't tell. And what shall I do?"

"What shall you do?" I repeated, wonderingly.

"Yes, that's what I've come to ask you about



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

now, for I knew you'd be able to tell me. Here in this last letter of hers she says, 'I shall be in Newport the sixteenth of August.' Lord! how I've hugged that postscript! It seemed to me she might be saying, 'Will you be there?' And here it is the fifteenth, and I'm here. But what good is it going to do me? At first, you see, after that dinner at Mrs. Cuttle's where I came on a fluke, a whole lot of people took me up. 'Mrs. Cuttle's asked that young Faircope. Suppose it will be safe for us,' was the way they reasoned about it. And I went round all the time just on the hope of seeing her. But now you know how it is. The Great League for Protecting Our Daughters from Needy Young Men has got me posted. I'm not invited to anything much, and I don't know how I'm going to see her. Heavens! it's awful! I could walk through barbed fences to get to her, but I simply can't break through Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey's front footman."

"Well," said I, looking very benevolently at the hapless lover, "Newport is a very much easier place in which to see people than New York. That's why all the anxious parents are so afraid of it. There's the Casino and Bailey's Beach—you'll probably meet her there. Just

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

hang round here and you'll find her. And," added I, "I'll tell you what I'll do: There are always young men dropping out from our dinners at the last moment. If there's a vacancy I'll be sure to speak to Mrs. Cuttle about you."

He wrung my hand. "Thanks," said he, in farewell. "I'm abject enough to take any invitation that little Eustace Staringarter wouldn't have."

But alas for young love caught in the jungle of Newport politics! On the 16th of August Mr. Stephen Faircope, having done the whole seven miles of the Cliff Walk in a nervous effort to use up time before the Casino hour, arrived at the first morning rendezvous just three minutes after Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey, her daughter, and a strange young man were making their way among the foamy groups of white-clad figures. During his plunge into fashionable circles Mr. Faircope had made a number of friends, and as he entered the place Pauline Brown caught him by the arm.

"Well, what do you think of it, Mr. Faircope?" asked this *débutante*.

"Of what?"

"Why, of Veronica Grey. Evidently it's

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

true—about her marrying the Viscount Sheepskin. That's he with the Greys now. He came over on the same steamer with them and is visiting at their house."

With sick eyes the young man turned to the group at the end of the pavilion. Just as he did so the band surged into "Oh, Thou Sublime Evening Star!" And just at that moment Miss Veronica Grey caught sight of the tall, white-flanneled figure. I was standing very close to her, and once again I saw, as I had at that first ball when he came up to her to be introduced, a sudden little catch in her eyes. When, several minutes later, he approached to speak to her, however, her tone was perfectly even. "Oh, how do you do, Mr. Faircope?" said she. "I'm so glad to see you again. And may I present you to the Viscount Sheepskin, Mr. Faircope?"

The Viscount Sheepskin had muscular cheeks mapped in those tiny crimson veins which so often appear in the English complexion. Otherwise he was tall and had a well-bred Oxford grumpiness. Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey, who had just slid a tepid hand through that of Mr. Stephen Faircope, surveyed these triple advantages with much pride.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Meanwhile, we had a guest in the house. We knew it because Hawkins and Henry reported that they saw a man going out of the door. We were confirmed by the fact that the bed in our wheat-colored room bloomed every evening in various pairs of shimmering pajamas. Otherwise, Mr. Eustace Staringarter used the greatest possible delicacy in sparing Mrs. Cuttle the painful consciousness.

The first night that this young gentleman arrived I found him groping about the halls for a bath directly under his eyes. The voice in which he asked me which way to go was decidedly knock-kneed, a circumstance which I connected with his sudden loss of memory in this respect.

It was then eight-thirty, and Mr. and Mrs. Cuttle were already sitting down to dinner. I was having my dinner with the family that night, and when I came in Mrs. Cuttle asked at once, "Where is Eustace?"

"Eustace," said I, "is hunting his bath. He seems to feel that it is fleeing from him."

"Lord!" said Mrs. Cuttle. "I hope you took him by the hand and let him down over the rim. And I do hope you showed him which was the cold faucet. That's what he needs."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Half an hour later our guest, who had in the mean while persuaded that obdurate bath to heed his suit, came down and was sufficiently revived to eat the tail-end of a dinner. It was a special dispensation, for in the next five days Mrs. Cuttle never once laid eyes on him.

"Have you seen Eustace?" she asked me on the morning of the fifth day.

"No," I said, "I haven't."

On that day, however, Fate softened toward Mrs. Cuttle. She was privileged to look once more on her guest at a luncheon given by the Sudbroke Browns. But he was nothing if not thoughtful, that Eustace Staringarter. On the morning that he left—two days later—his hostess received from him the following note:

DEAR MRS. CUTTLE,—So sorry not to have seen more of you. Had a fine time. Thanks.

Faithfully yours,

EUSTACE STARINGARTER.

"Well," remarked Mrs. Cuttle, somewhat hurt in spite of a specially well-developed cuticle for such occasions, "that is cool, I must say. No matter how much it hurt him, he might have looked up the old tavern-keeper to say good-by."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

After the Newport season the enfeebled participants generally crawl to hot springs or mud baths. It takes two or three weeks of such restoratives to bring them up to normal after their vacation by the sea. And small wonder. Newport is a game for only the hale and hearty.

To understand this, put a pedometer on the flying feet of a Newport day.

A Newport day generally begins, in fact, at half past eight in the evening and ends when the lusty sun is peering over the waters. One person usually attends three affairs an evening, and on a certain memorable night the fashionable set made the following notable record: It dined at Mrs. Cuttle's at the usual time; it danced at Mrs. Cuttle's from ten to twelve; on the stroke of midnight it picked up for the Bathby Dunns' and danced there until three; at this hour Mrs. Holbrook Current claimed the crowd until six. Just then some one had an inspiration. "Let's go down to Bailey's Beach," spoke down a wilted voice. As a result of this suggestion the fiery traveler of the skies, getting up to put the final touches on the rose of Tommy Ogle's breakfast-tray, was diverted from his task by the amazing contact of tired brokers and fresh breakers. After their swim,



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

literal or figurative, the gaiety-makers dragged their crippled bones back to the Bathby Dunns' for breakfast. It was the end of a perfect day.

The yachts anchored at Newport are a large factor in the life of the place. Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle, of course, never was able to afford one of these fifteen-hundred-dollar-a-day toys. Nevertheless, she, as well as all the other impoverished ones, shared in the benefits of the yachting few. The Sudbroke Browns, the Carl Frederick Commodores, the Blinker Van Feder Nests gave numerous luncheons and dinners on their pretty craft. And often Mrs. Cuttle was one of a week-end party taken for a cruise to Bar Harbor or Block Island.

Newport bachelors, as I have already said, are recruited largely from the three or four legations which have summer quarters here. These young diplomats are entertained by everybody, and they bring to the lavish entertainments the edge of honest hunger.

Seeing a young Spanish diplomat eating one day at Mrs. Cuttle's, I remarked to her, "Good gracious! just look at that man munching salad!"

"H'm!" said Mrs. Cuttle. "You'd munch, too, if you didn't get any more to eat than he does."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

These diplomats are the bread-line of Newport."

After I had been with her throughout the season I decided that they were also the ill-bred line. Entertained day after day, the Diplomatic Corps seldom gives any return for the hospitality heaped upon it. So much so is this the case that one young "Von" became conspicuous because he gave a number of little luncheons and dinners.

For a week after Mr. Stephen Faircope's encounter with Veronica Grey I saw nothing of this luckless lover. Then one day he came and had tea with me. The family was out, and as Hawkins and Parrins left the conservatory, where the tea was always staged at Newport, the young man plunged into the vortex of his gloom.

"Well," said he, "I haven't seen her except at a distance, and then only with that Sheepskin person. But I'm staying round just the same, and some of these days I'm going to meet her and have a talk with her. Oh yes, Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey doesn't need to think she is done with me yet."

At this moment one of those crowds of excursionists which are driven over Bellevue Ave-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

nue in sight-seeing autos was being instructed to a proper appreciation of Newport values.

“And here you have the house of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle, leader of the Four Hundred!” bawled out the driver through his megaphone.

Young Faircope rose indignantly from his chair. “And to think,” said he, bitterly, “she prefers this to me and ten thousand a year!”

## XVII

MRS. CUTTLE'S GREAT WATTEAU BALL—A \$12,000  
EVENING WITH MARIE ANTOINETTE—KNEES  
SUDDENLY PUBLISHED TO THE WORLD—VE-  
RONICA GREY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

MRS. CUTTLE did not like to get into a place from which she could not easily get out. She was equipped with social feelers corresponding to those sensitive whiskers by which Sir Thomas Mouser determines the wisdom of entering the dark, cobwebby corner under the porch. If the projectors warned her that the chances of exit were poor, very few inducements could make her enter.

This was the reason why Mrs. Cuttle would not subscribe to a box at the opera, and this was the reason why, on those rare occasions when somebody succeeded in cooping her and giving her the strong bran of Wagner, she took the forcible feeding with such a bad grace. It ex-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

plains, too, her attitude to the Percival Squiffen Van Clefs.

The Squiffen Van Clefs gave a housewarming. It was in honor of a new house filled with old furniture. Jacobean prevailed in the furnishings and the dinner was served consistently by men in beef-eater costumes. After the dinner everybody adjourned to the music-room. Here the lights were turned down and a few darkened bars of music drifted down upon the assembled guests. The whole thing was grimly artistic.

For a long time Mrs. Cuttle fidgeted in silence. Then, as one enfeebled strain of music crawled after another, she opened her lips once or twice. At last, when the slow, Gaelic lament had dropped its complete pall of gloom on the assemblage, she suddenly spoke up.

"Where's the corpse?" she asked, in a loud whisper.

The remark was carried to and fro in society. It was the one enlivening episode in a very firm evening. Aside, too, from its temporary advantages, the phrase illustrates the great leader's attitude. It explains why she was such a success in society.

"My entertainments," she once said to me, "are like screen doors. Everybody can see

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

through them and everybody can get out of them. That's why people are crazy to come to my things."

The heartiest specimen of these screen-door hospitalities was her fancy-dress ball. The ball included everybody in society, and its keel always struck a widening line of newspaper foam. Other people gave these feature entertainments. Mrs. Sudbroke Brown and Mrs. Simpson Heinmann and Mrs. B. C. Traymore generally enlivened August with one great spectacle. Somehow, though, Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's affairs always excited a wider publicity, and columns of American newspapers were thrown wide to the "half-million-dollar ball of the great society leader."

As a matter of fact, these entertainments did not cost half a million dollars. They did not cost even the fifty thousand which the more conservative journals attributed to them. Even the great Watteau ball, upon which must rest Mrs. Cuttle's abiding fame, did not require an outlay of more than twelve thousand dollars.

Yet the Watteau ball was undoubtedly one of the most sumptuous pageants ever witnessed by American society. To its achievement the florist, the caterer, the social entertainer and



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Mrs. Cuttle bent their supreme efforts. And all Newport society was drawn into the costly whirlpool.

It must be remembered that tradesmen have ever followed the court. At the beginning of each Newport season Woods, the caterer, and Hustler, the florist, install themselves at the famous resort. All the great specialty shops of New York and Boston blossom out on Bellevue Avenue, and it is to them that the fashionable colony looks for the splendid costumes of the great periodic masquerades. When, for example, the invitations for the Watteau ball were sent out, the firm of Gorgon & Vandal immediately brought down fifty or seventy-five costumes from which to make selection. Thanks to these magicians, the court of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle was suddenly switched to the court of Marie Antoinette.

The great ball commenced at ten o'clock. Long before that hour, however, the grounds bore testimony to the occasion. This was an evening when Art courted Nature. True, the latter wore her loveliest jewels of stars and her airy scarf of the Milky Way, but she shrank back in maidenly modesty and folded her mittened hands at the far side of the sofa before

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the advance of her bold wooer. It was not moonlight that bathed this expanse of clipped terrace. From pillar to pillar of the house hung bridles of colored electric lights. To these the pink and blue hydrangeas of the driveway turned their blanched faces. Under these the fountains leaped to a new radiance. And though at times you caught the roar of the sea as it beat on the cliffs hemming the rear of the villa, it was through the throb of the waltz which came from one of the orchestras inside the house. Nobody that night was involved in the speculation of little Paul Dombey. The wild waves might say what they liked.

Before the current of motors drifting down the Avenue swept into the glow of the grounds Mrs. Cuttle was standing at the door of her sea-foam ballroom. It was not, however, the Mrs. Cuttle of ordinary occasions. To-night she was attired in a gown of silver brocade from the tight bodice of which bounded the full skirts of the Louis Seize period. Two small pages clad in silver held the long train and from her shoulder hung the famous garlands of Cuttle diamonds. All this was sufficient to dam the doorway, yet beside her stood Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle, looking as uncomfortable as any substantial

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

American citizen ought to look when his knees are suddenly published to the world.

"H'm," said Mr. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey to his wife as they passed the blockade of welcome, "I bet Rhinebeck misses the frou-frou of his trousers. How will he ever get these muddy?"

Before the host had been thrown to his plum-colored suit of brocade he had taken a little vacation. He had slipped off to The Torrents, and just as soon as this knee-breeches term was served he planned to go back among the comforting oaks and beeches. He never cared for Newport.

"I can't sleep in this place," he used to say, gathered together in a pathetic bundle there on the wide veranda of his Newport home; "these waves make me nervous."

The happiest sight which I can recall at Newport was the husband of the great social leader as he sat in the crested motor bearing him away on one of his solitary excursions to that beloved home on the Hudson.

By a little past ten the ballroom was filled with its four hundred guests, and the twentieth century was completely drowned under waves of silk and brocade, under foam of peruke and

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

powdered hair. The only tombstone of the deceased was Parrins, upon whose conventional black envelopments the host cast an occasional wistful eye. For the rest, any one of the old Versailles crowd would have felt thoroughly at home at Mrs. Cuttle's that evening.

The setting for this picture was admirable. Mrs. Cuttle's ballroom was entered by a balcony leading out of the drawing-room, and the balcony, furnished in yellow brocade, looked like a buttercup caught up in a flood of grasses. Everything in this lovely hall was of green, and as you came down the five steps of the balcony you caught sight of nothing but rows of French windows before which fluttered long curtains of sea-green threaded with the merest ghost of silver. On nearer view you discovered before each window dainty little seats—banquets, they are called—covered by the same color of green brocade dimmed by a tiny silver thread. In between these, marble vases of palms and ferns were set against the white of stucco walls.

As each bit of powder and patches came in on the arm of peruke and snuff-box, the sea-green background caught them up and held them. At last the whole room was like a giant billow

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

to which have been scattered handfuls of confetti. Even among these iridescent groups one caught immediate sight of Miss Veronica Grey. She was clad this evening in lavender silk and her dark hair was unpowdered. Beside her the muscular cheeks of the Viscount of Sheepskin—they looked, under his white wig, very much like the dark red of a winter sunset under snow-capped mountains—abandoned themselves to the unusual strain of spoken comment.

“Quite ripping, you know!” vouchsafed the young nobleman, generously, looking over the scene before him.

Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey, daughter of a hundred ship-chandlers and petty tradesmen, glowed over this tailored encomium. Her daughter, however, had the same old air of looking out through an open window. It was only when she became sensible of the remarks of a few people in the group to which she belonged that she finally waked up.

“She isn’t really so large, but she scatters so,” was saying Miss Amoretta Jenkins.

“That dress certainly makes her look like a Plymouth Rock,” contributed Mr. Skiley Lark. True to the memory of his pajamas embroidered

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

lyrically in forget-me-nots, Mr. Lark was now wearing a suit of baby-blue satin. "Too bunchy!" he added, severely.

"She's wearing all her jewels to-night," said Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey, leveling her lorgnette. "I just wonder if they're real."

Mr. Eustace Staringarter tapped his jeweled snuff-box with incandescent finger-tips over which fell a pleasing lampshade effect of white lace.

"Real!" he echoed, scornfully. "Those things that look as though a hen had laid them! Not much!"

"I do wish she'd plait them," hissed Mrs. Firthkins Forth, a dowager of seventy; "they're so unbecoming boxed."

It was the appearance of their hostess which the fashionable guests were now grating down to fine bits. Just as Mrs. Cuttle was leveled to fritter size, however, a champion intervened. It was Veronica Grey, her cheeks flaming to an even brighter red and her gray eyes stirred now out of all dreaminess.

"I think she looks extremely handsome and commanding," said she, in her cool, ferny voice; "and if her friends were all as real as her diamonds—"



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Her angry gaze swept the circle of assailers and rested at last upon Mr. Eustace Starin-garter.

“Meaning?” drawled this lozenge-shaped gentleman in his heliotrope brocade.

“Meaning everybody who accepts her hospitality, who begs for her invitations, and then talks about her,” replied Veronica Grey. “She’s blunt and she says what she thinks—it’s a virtue that isn’t shared by her friends. But I prefer Mrs. Cuttle to her friends.”

At this moment one of the long sea-green curtains of the window before which she stood billowed out beside her. She put it back in place, and when she lifted her eyes again they fell on a figure standing at the other end of the room. Once more I saw the strange little catch in her eyes. It was Mr. Stephen Faircope, just that moment arrived.

I had, in fact, finally made good my promise to this stricken young man. At three o’clock that afternoon had come the regrets of a certain young diplomat noted for his abrupt seizures of “important appointments.”

“Heavens!” cried Mrs. Cuttle, in anger, “that man is always dropping out. He’s like a cockney ‘h.’ What in the world shall we do? I’ve

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

got to have another man or it will spoil the minuet figures."

I pretended to be casting about me. At last: "Well," said I, "there's that young Stephen Faircope. He's in town, I think."

"Have him by all means," commanded Mrs. Cuttle, amiably; "he'll look like a bonbon dressed up, and there can't be any harm in having him now. That foolish Veronica Grey seems to be settled at last with the Viscount of Sheepskin."

So here was Mr. Faircope and there was Veronica, and I, the god from the machine, waited to see what the Watteau ball would bring forth.

## XVIII

MRS. CUTTLE DECIDES TO HAVE A FEW TREES—  
THE VISCOUNT OF SHEEPSKIN SUDDENLY  
LEAVES NEWPORT—VERONICA GREY MAKES  
AN IMPORTANT DECISION.

A LITTLE after this incident the entire side of the ballroom was taken out, and the opening left a vista of lawn over which drifted the rays of an artificial moonlight. Simultaneously, the brilliant chandeliers and sconces of the ballroom gave place to this same silvery light. The great feature which had brought Mrs. Falconvaux, the social entertainer, for a three days' sojourn at Mrs. Cuttle's was about to be put on.

Ordinarily there were no trees to distract from the clipped perfection of our Bellevue Avenue lawn. Mrs. Cuttle, however, was not one to be dismayed by such scenic shortcomings. Like the confident lady of Chicago, who replied to a visitor's objections regarding the absence

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

of mountains from her native city: "But we don't like mountains; if we did, we should have them," Mrs. Cuttle decided to have a few trees.

"You think it would be prettier to have foliage in the background?" said she to Mrs. Falconvaux. "Very well; we'll go out and get some."

These accessories were not the kind that tremble at the touch of the ingénue as she walks down Main Street in Act I. They were genuine lords of the forest, cut down by our gardeners and set up at intervals over the grounds. From this leafy background there suddenly sped three barefoot nymphs clad in white chiffon, wreathed in flowers, and bearing on each wrist a pair of snowy doves. Like pale moths they fluttered into the rose-covered walk bordering the ballroom. The moonlight beat upon their flying white draperies, and above the fluting of the orchestra you heard—or did you dream it?—the faint lisp of the sea.

Then suddenly the spinning figures paused. They threw back their heads exultantly, and from their outstretched arms wheeled the doves up among the crimson roses overhead. Everybody gasped with the beauty of the movement and the stillness was braved by only one voice.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"I say, you know, this is quite ripping!" said the Viscount of Sheepskin.

At this moment there walked into the ball-room flooded with its mock moonlight a dozen little pages, clad in white satin and carrying in their hands odd, globular lanterns of white paper. Forming a semicircle in front of the audience, the little pages sat cross-legged with their lanterns held before them. At that moment the other lights of the room vanished, and when the three mothlike figures ran in from the arbor of roses the only glow upon them came from those firefly lanterns.

I looked at the flying figures in the ring of paper glowworms, at the brocaded and silken guests swimming in fitful drifts of light, and I caught my breath. Never in my life have I seen anything so beautiful. And for the first time, I think, I realized just why Mrs. Cuttle was the acknowledged leader of her set. It was not only the tremendous energy, the moving belief in herself and the rugged honesty which lifted her so far above a society where all these things were rare. The secret of her power was the sense of pageantry which led her to select this idea of Mrs. Falconvaux's.

For this spectacle she paid the social enter-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

tainer only eight hundred dollars, a small sum when one considers the amounts said to have been given by Mrs. Armington Squibbs and by Mrs. Sudbroke Brown for the opera-singers who always precipitated a riot for the place near the door. Indeed, although many people spent more in entertaining, the results were mere dollar-fumed festivals. Compared to the Watteau ball, most other Newport entertainments of similar character took the hue of that gaudy celebration with which the plump-checked Henry VIII crowned Anne Boleyn to the tune of fountains running wine, "white, claret, and red." This and some of her other entertainments swept Mrs. Cuttle far out of the arc of tasteless extravagance into the companionship of Beau Brummell, D'Orsay, and Petronius, those elegant embroiderers of life who, though poor, have shown the very rich just how the thing ought to be done.

But now the spectacle ended, and in what a triumphant jet of splendor! The barefoot dancers suddenly freed the doves from the threads which previously had brought them back, and as the white birds fluttered upward a whole swarm of butterflies covering the ceiling trembled into light. The next day, in describing



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

the fête, the various papers said that these butterflies were real, and that for days we had set bands of small boys to the task of gathering them. The butterflies were not real, however. They were wired and set into motion by an elaborate electrical device. Indeed, as I have already said, this was an evening when Art courted Nature. Trees, moonlight, and butterflies all showed just how Mrs. Cuttle made Nature accept the conditions which she imposed.

After the doves had winged their way into the night the electric lights of the ballroom were again switched on. Everybody gulped. Was it all a dream—the shafts of moonlight, the flying feet of the nymphs, the dazzling white birds? Well, Newport had the constitution to resist dreams. In a moment people were asking for food.

“I think I’ll have an ice and some punch,” drawled Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg, from the center of a group where clustering wigs and perukes had the effect of a great ball of popcorn.

“Me, too,” said Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey.

I have not mentioned as yet the fact that a big Newport ball did not include dinner. This responsibility was undertaken by five or six

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

hostesses, who at ten o'clock brought their individual parties to rest in the ample lap of the great function. On the night of the Watteau ball, for example, Mrs. B. C. Traymore had entertained sixty or more guests at a splendid "Silver Dinner," where, of course, everybody appeared in costume.

Yet, although there was no organized attack upon food at the great costume ball, the gallant minute-men did not fail in their duty. In the dining-room and on the glass-inclosed verandas Woods, the caterer, had set up a number of small tables where all through the evening a buffet supper was served; and from ten to three you saw conscientious groups going at the champagne, punch, sandwiches, and ices.

It was during one of these informal sallies upon the buffet that I strolled off into a garden adjoining the ballroom. This little garden was a fairy retreat. Just about the size of the ballroom itself, it was lined with hedges twisting craftily here and there to satisfy the most profound needs of those bent on solitude. In the center a little fountain played under the electric lights, and every here and there a marble bench cut into the darkness of the hedges. On one of these benches were seated a man and a

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

girl. Coming from a rear door and screened by the foliage, I was not seen by them, and for a moment I paused, irresolute. In that moment I recognized the broad shoulder of Mr. Stephen Faircope and over it the face of Miss Veronica Grey.

"But you don't—you don't!" the young man cried, fiercely.

"But I am—I am!" wailed the girl. She was not looking out of the window now.

At the word the young man bent forward and seized her hands, and I could see the strength of the muscles under the gleaming satin coat.

"Veronica!" cried he. It was the cry one sends after the drowning.

"Nasty step there—be careful!"

The voice of the Viscount of Sheepskin snapped like a whip as he guided Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey from one of the French windows of the ballroom into the little garden. None too soon Miss Veronica Grey jumped from the marble bench.

"Oh, here you are, Veronica," said the mother, giving her a look of stern rebuke. "We've been hunting for you every place. The Viscount wants you to go and have some punch."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

The three of them started off together, but at the window of the ballroom Miss Veronica Grey turned back to the tall figure in white satin.

"We have one more waltz to-night, Mr. Faircope," called she from under the look of her mother's disapproval.

All this time I had not dared to move. Now, however, I touched the young man on the sleeve.

"Oh, Mrs. Pemberton!" said he, hoarsely.

For a moment we did not speak. Then, seating himself beside me on the bench where he had so lately sat with Miss Veronica Grey, he buried his face in his hands.

"It's no good," said he at last; "she's going to marry him. She told me so to-night."

The fountain before us leaped under the colored electric lights, and the sea pounded on its cliffs. Then suddenly the orchestra inside launched into "The Beautiful Blue Danube."

The young man raised his face. "Shut up!" roared he. "The Danube isn't blue—none of the things are true that waltz says."

But when at last he turned his eyes to mine they were very gentle. "You remember what I told you about seeing her picture in Paris and wanting to save her from something—I didn't

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

know what! Well, I know now—it's from herself. Those lovely, captive eyes that dream so far, that want so much— Oh, I can't break the thing that's holding them. I've tried, but I can't." He paused and looked at the gay little fountain and then turned to me. "Why is it, I wonder? What can being born in this set do to you? Why, it's just as though I said to some lovely mermaid, 'Come out with me and walk with me and talk with me.' The brain of her would understand how nice the shore was, the eyes would say how much she wanted to come. But she couldn't do it. Her body couldn't follow. Well, I and my ten thousand a year are the pebbly shore, and Miss Veronica Grey can't come out to us. Water is her element, and she would stump her finny little tail if she left it."

"Well," said I, "all is not lost."

"No," said he, rising just as the music came to an end, "everything is not lost. I still have my last waltz with her."

But indeed it was not a last waltz, for that night, as he and Miss Veronica Grey entered once more the little garden, they were stopped by a voice on the other side of the hedge. The Viscount of Sheepskin was speaking in those

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

accents that sounded as though they had been sent home every morning fresh from the laundry.

“No, only two hundred thousand pounds, and not quite that! But it’s the best I can do, and, anyway, dash take it! I happen to be rather fond of the girl.”

Perhaps Miss Veronica Grey had understood beforehand something of what she was doing. But seeing the cold storm-clouds and feeling the hail into which they crystallize are two different things. And for a moment she stood there pelted by each word. She bent her head, her lip quivered, and the Watteau fan broke under the clutch of her fingers.

“Veronica!” cried the young man, in an agony of compassion. “Oh, Veronica, don’t mind, dear. I’m here.”

It was a long time before the girl said anything. At last, though, she wheeled about and threw back her head; and I, who sat unheeded on the marble bench near by, thrilled at the tenderness in her eyes.

“I am not—I am not,” she said, softly.

The broken fan fell then between their clasped hands. And when the Viscount of Sheepskin walked out with the young English



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

diplomat to whom he had been talking he found the cause that sent him and his English boxes flying from Newport on the morrow. To Mr. Stephen Faircope the Watteau ball was a very pleasant occasion.

## XIX

WHEN THE SOCIAL TIRES SKIDDED—OUTDOING  
ONE'S RIVALS—THE MIKADO DINNER PRE-  
CEDING THE TRAYMORE BALL—MODEST RE-  
QUESTS FROM THE READING PUBLIC.

I HAVE already said that the Watteau ball cost Mrs. Cuttle about twelve thousand dollars. An understanding of the enormous expense involved is helped by mention of some of the individual items. Woods, the caterer, asked between fifteen hundred and two thousand dollars for his services. Mrs. Falconvaux, as I have already said, charged us eight hundred dollars for the beautiful spectacle of the evening. As against the one orchestra which we employed at our New York dinners, we had here two such organizations—one in the ballroom itself, and the other in the little gold-colored balcony—and for the two we paid nearly six hundred dollars. As to the florist, his toll from the ball was about seven hundred and fifty.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

It must not be imagined that Mrs. Cuttle and her set paid their bills buoyantly. Only those whose wealth is recent ever flush with pleasure at handing out one thousand dollars for a five-hundred-dollar Bokhara rug. The people hardened to money generally want an explanation why a five-hundred-dollar Bokhara is costing them two hundred and fifty dollars. So, although Mrs. Cuttle was conspicuously prompt in paying her tradesmen, she was equally prompt in protesting their bills.

On the occasion of the Watteau ball she tackled the florist.

"What do you mean by charging me all that money?" asked she. "Why, I could buy a small chicken-farm for what those hydrangeas cost me."

The florist met this reproach with dignity. "Yes, Mrs. Cuttle," said he, "but what I asked Mrs. Sudbroke Brown for exactly the same sort of thing would have bought a small ostrich-farm. I charged her just twice as much."

The florist, indeed, was not one to be trifled with. He was a pivotal point in the affairs of Newport, and many are the legends which cluster about this figure. One of these is con-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

cerned with a certain dinner given by Mrs. Cuttle.

For this dinner she had arranged to have hollyhock decorations. When, however, the ceiling was all wired and half of it covered with the required blooms, the florist discovered that he could get no more hollyhocks. The market had been cornered by Mrs. Sudbroke Brown, who, unknown to Mrs. Cuttle, had hit upon the same flower for the decorations of her daughter's coming-out ball.

When at half past three Mrs. Cuttle came upon the thwarted operations of the florist, she tightened up like the Arctic Sea. She looked at the unfortunate tradesman, she looked at the ceiling, half hollyhock, half naked wires.

"And what are you going to do with the other—leg?" demanded she at last.

The florist, standing high on a ladder, was at that moment engaged in twisting his last stalk over several yards of wires.

"Oh, they'll be coming along," replied he, soothingly. "I've sent out over the country to find some."

So, too, he had. To east and west and north and south our representatives had ridden forth to get a little stalk in the hollyhock corporation.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Hawkins had been detailed to duty. Two of the florist's men had ridden forth on bicycles, and a number of small boys had been employed to raid every quaint little yard of the old-fashioned houses of lower Newport. All in vain. At half past four none of our scouts had returned with booty.

"Well, Mr. Hustler," fumed Mrs. Cuttle, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Oh, they'll be coming along," the florist reassured her.

Mrs. Cuttle stamped her foot. "You're a fool, Mr. Hustler. You've been telling me that all afternoon, and now look at this room!"

At this moment one of the florist's men entered from the outside. Little rivulets of perspiration ran down his cheek and his clothes were muddy. Yet he was bringing his sheaves with him. In one hand he held proudly aloft one underfed specimen of hollyhock.

"I got this under the fence," panted he, "in a little house five miles out from town. I guess the others hadn't seen it."

"They certainly have hocked all the holly round here," commented Hawkins, with a broad grin and a less perfect aspiration than is indicated here.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Mrs. Cuttle felt just about as agreeable as would Beau Brummell in a faultily creased shirt. To fail in any of her social enterprises was with her a very poignant grief. She could not get over it. And that evening when her guests assembled under the shelter of red roses she was still looking ruefully at the place where the hollyhocks should have been.

Seldom, indeed, was it that the tires of the famous hostess ever skidded. When they did, she was the most miserable of beings. And never shall I forget her at the time of another big dinner—this one given in town.

On this occasion the feature of the entertainment had required a covering of grass for the ballroom floor. Afterward, when the footmen started to remove the verdure, all the guests were seized with a strange affection.

"Achoo!" said Mrs. Horatius Plutenberg, behind her lace handkerchief.

"Achoo!" said Mr. Carl Frederick Commodore.

"Heavens! Miss Sadie," piped Tommy Ogle, "this isn't grass you've given us; it's hay fever."

It was, in fact, less a rug than an epidemic. And as clouds of dust billowed over the guests



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

from every depth of those ancient folds Mrs. Cuttle ran away to cover her chagrin.

“Where is Mrs. Cuttle?” asked Mr. Carl Frederick Commadore.

I knew, but I would not tell him. She had taken sanctuary from her sixty sneezing guests, and not until almost an hour later did I succeed in dragging her out. The incident is characteristic. Anybody else in her set would have laughed at the dust-ridden property. That was exactly why they were not all Mrs. Cuttles. In order to succeed you must take your work seriously; and with the great society leader her entertainments were as much of a religion as were cravats with Beau Brummell.

It was not often that anything like this happened at these numerous parties of Mrs. Cuttle's. Her indefatigable energy and her close attention to detail insured against failure. Certainly the other pole of the situation was reached at the Mikado dinner with which she preluded Mrs. B. C. Traymore's Japanese ball.

Mrs. Cuttle had been looking forward to the Traymore ball, but with some reservations. Although she loved the waters of gaiety, she herself liked to charge the waters. In this she always reminded me of a leading juvenile spirit.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

We all know that kind of boy. When the others suggest, "Let's play Indian," he always says, "No, let's play train, and I will be the conductor." If, however, the original recreational program is followed, he manages somehow to think up something entirely new and fascinating in the way of red-man behavior. In similar wise Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle contrived to outdo the great Japanese ball of Mrs. Traymore.

The opening offered her was a big dinner party preceding the ball. As soon as we sent out the invitations for this affair Mrs. Cuttle began casting about her.

"What can we get up that's original?" she commenced to ask, the very first thing.

At this opportune moment there arrived on the scene an Oriental dealer from New York. In order to advertise himself, this merchant made us a tremendous offer. He would bring down some of his finest wares, said he, decorate our dining-room, and make our dinner more Japanese than a willow-ware plate. And the cost? Simply nothing. All he wanted was just a rub from the magic lamp of Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle's name.

At first Mrs. Cuttle demurred. Finally, however, when he told her that his offer had been

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

refused by Mrs. Traymore, she began to brighten.

"I'll take you," she agreed, eagerly. And to me she whispered, "This will make Janet Traymore's ball look like the landscape under a Christmas tree. Just wait!"

Her prediction was fulfilled. When the guests—deftly transformed by obis and embroidered tunics, by fans and henna stain—arrived in our front hall, they were confronted by a figure on a throne. It was the Oriental dealer impersonating the Mikado, and beside him stood the seven-foot giant we had borrowed from one of the vaudeville performances then running in town.

As each guest was announced he made a low Oriental obeisance before the mock Mikado, and the prolonged man beside him intoned something that sounded like "Chung, chung, chung." All this was a worthy introduction to the dinner itself. Served on teakwood tables framed in the rich embroideries of Tokio and lighted by fantastic lanterns placed at the top of triangular beams of teakwood, the Mikado dinner successfully filtered the interest from Mrs. Traymore's ball. Instead of the dinner's being a prologue to the ball, the latter was reduced

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

to a mere epilogue of the former. It was a characteristic stroke of the great playmaker's genius.

I must not forget to speak of the letters which invariably followed in the wake of one of Mrs. Cuttle's great Newport balls. As soon as people in Grand Rapids and St. Augustine and Los Angeles read the inflamed accounts of one of these princely festivals, they woke up to a new possibility of revenue. "If you can afford to spend half a million dollars on one evening's entertainment, why can't you spare a little bit for our new piano or the baby's perambulator or Mary's musical instruction in Dresden?" That is the attitude of all of those hundreds of letters which flood the social secretary of a great society hostess.

Most of these requests were, of course, ungratified. Now and then, however, Mrs. Cuttle was moved to respond. One such instance was the purchase of some lace sent her by an invalid in the South.

"Make her out a check for twenty-five dollars," commanded she when she heard this letter. "Of course, Mrs. Pembie," she added, ruefully, "you know I have no more use for those lace things than I have for a toy Noah's

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

ark. Heavens! To think anybody should think I was rich!"

One appeal stands out like a reef from all the sea of such correspondence. It came just after the Watteau ball and it read as follows:

MY DEAR MRS. CUTTLE,—If you have all that money to spend on champagne and nymphs and fancy-dress costumes, I should like you to send me a seven-passenger automobile. I shouldn't so much care for myself, but my parents are old and they've never even been inside an automobile. Perhaps you could send us one of your last year's cars.

P. S.,—I am particularly anxious for a seven-passenger automobile because we want to take our friends.

Mrs. Cuttle chuckled over this letter. Its sweeping and confident tone pleased her much more than the justifiable requests of many others.

"I just wish I could send that girl an automobile," she said to me. "If I had any money now I certainly should do it. Seven-passenger, if you please! Now there's something in that girl. She's got spirit. Most of these people would have asked for a runabout, and then said they wanted it because grandma had the gout and couldn't get to church."

## XX

WASHINGTON DURING THE SEASON—THE GUEST  
WHO THOUGHT A DINNER WAS SOMETHING  
ONE ATE—THE END OF SOCIAL DESIRE—  
MEETING “MOTHER’S FRIENDS.”

MRS. CUTTLE was a lichen fastened tight to the rocks of New York and Newport. Very seldom did she go abroad, and only once did she plant those entertainments of hers in the sandy soil of an alien spot. This one exception was the occasion of a month’s stay in Washington.

In the national capital we rented a large house. From this base our campaign started with an enormous official reception to which came more than eight hundred of the one thousand invited guests. This was followed up by a brilliant series of dinners and receptions distinguished one and all by a trait which had been steadily growing in Mrs. Cuttle’s character ever since I first came to her. This was her anxiety



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

to get through with these plays which she so thoroughly delighted to plan.

For instance, it was only ten o'clock in the evening of her first big dinner when, drawing me aside, she said: "Tell the orchestra to play 'Home, Sweet Home.' I've had enough of these people."

"But," I remonstrated, "you can't do that. Remember, this is not Newport and New York. Everybody is watching you here. Everybody is going to criticize you."

With great reluctance she extended the time-limit to half past ten. On another occasion, however, she was not so lenient. This time her impatience got the better of her in the face of a dogged appetite.

The appetite belonged to her guest of honor, the man who was destined within the year to high office. This gentleman had been brought up in the tradition that a dinner was something that you eat. Consequently, when Mrs. Cuttle threw the fish on the film he acted just as though it were not a motion-picture dinner. When, two minutes later, Mrs. Cuttle signed impatiently for the footmen to remove the course, this guest of honor was still attacking his whitebait with an unhurried fork.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Mrs. Cuttle looked at him and fumed. At last, becoming conscious of her scrutiny, he glanced up.

"Oh, you're not going to take it away from me yet," pleaded he. "Give me just one minute more."

The hostess tapped her foot nervously. "Very well, then," said she, "I'll give you just one minute."

Quite unruffled by this ultimatum, the statesman proceeded with the whitebait. At last Mrs. Cuttle could stand it no longer.

"Oh," said she, "it's no wonder you are so fat!"

The great man threw back his head and laughed his jolliest laugh. It was his favorite story for many weeks to come. He, like many another, found a very refreshing quality in Mrs. Cuttle's unmasked emotions.

Mrs. Cuttle was now a woman in middle life. Her hair was still dark; her figure, through the morning walk which she invariably took, had kept its broad, strong-muscled lines, and the daily ministrations of the masseuse had held the skin of her face smooth and tight as a grape. Yet you could not say that the great society leader looked young.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Mrs. Cuttle had lived among dinners and house parties and balls. And now both body and face seemed to have hardened with the swift iciness of the life. Only the eyes, straining out from the forced smoothness of the cheeks, seemed to look fearfully at some far point.

Where was she peering? The answer was easy. It was there in that grove of old society dames who, exiled from the more youthful amusements, fumble with the whist cards at a table by themselves, and manage to keep alive by those crumbs of gossip which fall from the platters of those still young enough to be gossiped about. This is the end of every society woman's desire, and Mrs. Cuttle began to feel the way darken about her.

The fact that she was growing old was brought home to her in various ways. One day Undine Plutenberg, meeting her at the Casino at Newport, said from under her half-closed lids, "I suppose you're going to Mrs. Skiley Lark's luncheon next week?" The Lark, by the way, was now happily nested.

The great society leader looked stunned. She had not even heard of Mrs. Lark's luncheon—she who used to whip up the cream of Newport to a rigid thickness of gaiety.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Why, no," she stammered at length; "I didn't know she was giving one."

At that moment who would not have felt sorry for Mrs. Cuttle? It was the first letter of the writing on the wall—the writing which said, "Mrs. Cuttle, you belong to the older set."

The next week Mrs. Skiley Lark called upon Mrs. Cuttle and asked her to a luncheon for the following Thursday.

"Just a few of mother's friends," explained the young hostess, blithely.

This was too much. It was like rubbing an open wound with a Turkish towel.

"Mother's friends—ugh!" shivered Mrs. Cuttle. "If there's just one thing I don't want to be it's a 'mother's friend.' And next it will be grandmother's. Heavens! how I hate the thought of growing old, Mrs. Pemberton. I can just see myself with three plumes nodding from my head, like old Madame Schlafknabe's, and with three chins trickling down. Won't it be dreadful! to sit around and play bridge and turn your good ear and quaver, 'Did you make it spades?' Spades! It will be all spades—just one long round of spades. Not a heart or a diamond in the pack."

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

There could be no doubt about it, either. In these days Mrs. Cuttle was being set aside. To be sure, her Newport season was as brilliant as ever. She still gave the same great pageants, and she was, of course, always included in everybody's big affairs. Yet one after another of the young groups dropped Mrs. Cuttle from the more intimate festivities.

"Nowadays," said Mrs. Cuttle to me one day, "when a young man is introduced to me he looks scared as a boy when he meets his arithmetic teacher. It's a sure sign, Mrs. Pemberton—when a young man measures the distance to the door as he is being introduced."

Meanwhile, what had become of Mrs. Cuttle's set, the brilliant group which I had first found assembled amid the dusky red hangings of the country house by the Hudson? As a general rule, these were drifting along with Mrs. Cuttle to the inevitable place by the pantry door of life. Miss Juanita Douglas was still of ambiguous age and definite social purpose. Mr. Jules Cambartin always continued at the height of his career as professional bachelor. The Armington Squibbs lapsed gently into grandparenthood.

As for Miss Veronica Grey, she married young

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Stephen Faircope in the autumn following the Watteau ball. Her mother and all her set mourned the wayward fancy which would depart from debt-racked English acres to settle on an obscure young architect. Yet the marriage was by no means a social failure. Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey saw to that. This noted society matron had, in fact, that tepidity of manner which always indicates a will stronger than the highest ideals and firmest resolves of other people. Her daughter had not married a desirable young man. Very well, then! The only course open to a society matron was to make him desirable. And Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey did it.

Through her influence, Mr. Stephen Faircope became a fashionable and highly paid architect. His investments were all prosperous, and as a result Miss Veronica never lost her place in society.

The two of them came often to Mrs. Cuttle's place on the Hudson, and once, ten years afterward, I had a long talk with Stephen Faircope. By this time the powerful swinging figure had grown much stouter. Even golf at the most fashionable country club in New York had not been able to keep down certain encroachments



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

on his latter waistcoat buttons. His blue eyes had lost, I thought, something of the old fearlessness. In its place there had crept an unmistakable look—the nervous desire to get out of one place into another.

These eyes met mine rather sadly as he sat that day in my little gold sitting-room at The Torrents.

“Strange,” said he, abruptly, “I was thinking to-day of what I had told you that night of the Watteau ball—that Veronica was a mermaid and that I was the pebbly shore. I thought then, you see, that she was coming out of her element to my element. Heavens! what conceit! It doesn’t work that way. What chance has the pebbly shore got against the mighty ocean—the great big hungry ocean that doubles its white fists over the stones and throws them out a thousand miles?”

He picked up a paper-cutter from the desk—strange to say, it happened to be a figure of Neptune—and ran his square, white fingers over the edge. “Ah yes, the god of the sea!” mused he, with a rueful smile. “He’s got me, Mrs. Pemberton, hard and fast. I’m pulled far out, and every day I get a new little layer of brine—that’s the standards of Mrs. Tinkle-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

ton Mannerly Grey settling down on me, flake by flake, just as they have for years on Veronica. Now, I'm—well, I'm pickled!" cried he, rising and walking up and down the room. "Look at me," said he, stopping suddenly in front of me. "I'm a successful man, Mrs. Pemberton. I build lovely things—for even the salt deposit has not yet eaten into my love of my work—but I'm always thinking of the money that I'm going to get for them. And meanwhile my poor little tightened-up heart is asking for such prizes, is torn by such regrets! I feel a twinge of pain if Mrs. Sudbroke Brown does not include us in one of her yachting trips. I have my eye fixed on a third motor. I scramble with all my might to seem as stupid as Mr. Eustace Starin-garter really is. I get into a panic if Veronica doesn't have as many and as beautiful gowns as Mrs. Skiley Lark. I'm just—"

At this moment he saw the figure of his wife standing out in the grounds patiently listening to Mr. Rhinebeck Cuttle's loving description of a new tree. The tenderest light came into his eyes, a light that made me think of the gallant boy whom I had met years ago.

"She's worth it," he said. "I wouldn't have had it any other way." He got up abruptly

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

and walked away. At the door he stopped and looked back at me. "Only," said he, solemnly, "I didn't save her, Mrs. Pemberton. I just got to be her fellow-captive."

"Stephen!" called Mrs. Tinkleton Mannerly Grey from the library. "Stephen, come here."

"The voice of Neptune," said the man. "She's reminding me that the Silvers are here, and that they're going to build a new town house and I'd better hang round."

But though Miss Veronica Grey stayed, there were others more deciduous. Mrs. Norman Digly—pretty little Mrs. Digly—withdrew more and more from the set in order to peck at new creeds and old religions. As for Mrs. Stephen Harcourt, the end of this coquettish beauty was swift and dramatic.

One day at The Torrents that polite and meager man who was Mrs. Harcourt's husband walked into the reception-room late after luncheon. There was a pathetic look in the pale eyes, his scarf was awry, and his hat had been old several seasons ago.

Seeing this straw hat lying on the marble Renaissance table of the reception-hall, I said to Parrins, "Whose hat is that?" I really thought it belonged to our useful man.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

"Why, that's Mr. Harcourt's, madam," said Parrins, and his eyes met mine in sorrowful recognition of a fact.

The fact was the divorce proceedings which Mrs. Harcourt instituted several weeks afterward. In the face of all objections she married a man whose income wasn't one-quarter Mr. Harcourt's. And Mrs. Cuttle never forgave her.

Time and again after that the former intimate called up the house and tried to speak with Mrs. Cuttle. All in vain. I, who had firm instructions from the great leader, always parried the request.

"She's out," or, "Sorry, but she's in her bath now," were my invariable responses, and in reply the former Mrs. Harcourt would say: "It's all right, Mrs. Pemberton. I understand what that means."

Mrs. Cuttle frequently talked over the affair with me. "It was abominable, the way she treated Steve Harcourt—nice chap as ever breathed," she used to say. "It isn't that she's poor now—that doesn't make any difference."

Well, perhaps this was true in Mrs. Cuttle's case, for beneath all her eccentricities was a rock-ribbed fidelity to her friends. But as to the others in society who banished Mrs. Har-

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

court, there was always a little imp of doubt grinning behind the curtain of virtuous condemnation. If she had married ten millions, would she now be sitting alone on the veranda of her little country home? It is a question that may be answered only by those authorities familiar with the controlling emotions of the fashionable world.

As to Popocatepetl, the small Mexican spaniel who followed out the lines of his national destiny by being always a center of alarm and uneasiness, he died of a fashionable dog malady, and his place was filled by Moses, a tiny skein of white wool with eyes like little pink grapes. Moses was not afraid of Mrs. Cuttle. Every day when she was expected back from her walk he would run and curl himself up in the rug between the two lordly footmen and wait there for her coming. As a result, Mrs. Cuttle loved Moses.

## XXI

“GROWING OLD” IN SOCIETY—THE TIME WHEN  
EVEN “THE GADFLY” OMITTS ITS USUAL STING  
—GRADUAL DIMMING OF A SOCIAL LIGHT—  
THE END OF THE GREAT GAME.

ALL this time Mrs. Cuttle realized dimly that she was growing old. Yet it was not until one day at the Newport Casino that something changed her whole attitude. After that it was with her as it was with Chesterfield when the great arbiter of fashion wrote from his exile, “Tyrawley and I have been dead these two years, but we do not want it known.”

On this day Mrs. Cuttle entered the familiar pavilion with her usual firm tread. Her oak-like figure now as always made her seem very much taller than she really was. To-day more than ever she gave you that sense of having invaded the room. Even so, there was something different about her.

Mr. Eustace Staringarter, the center of a



## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

group which ruffled at her coming, saw the something. "Hm!" said he, "the old lady's breaking," and his voice reached the ears of Mrs. Cuttle.

Old lady! Breaking! The words seared Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle. That night at her big dinner the diamonds seemed to weigh heavily upon her, and she ordered the orchestra to play its farewell strains long before the most of her guests found the thought of home sweet or even palatable.

Left alone in her drawing-room, Mrs. Cuttle sat down wearily on one of the little white fluted chairs. A copy of *The Gadfly* lay on the table near by, and she listlessly turned its pages.

"Anything in about us?" I asked.

"No, nothing," said she.

Even *The Gadfly* had failed of late to honor us with its usual sting—an ominous sign indeed!

She fixed her eyes on the open window. "What is it, Mrs. Pemberton?" said she, suddenly.

"What is what?" asked I.

"Why, this *us*," said she, dreamily, "this thing that goes about with us, that makes us know we're ourselves and not somebody else?"

Mrs. Cuttle groping among the tangled skeins

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

of existence for the secret of the individual soul, Mrs. Cuttle echoing here on her velvet carpet above the upturned pages of *The Gadfly* the poignant cry of every poet and philosopher—this picture will always be to me the most impressive in all society's long gallery.

Ever since I had been with her, Mrs. Cuttle had been in the habit of giving a great Christmas celebration for the families of the men employed on her husband's country estate. The beginning of November we found out from the superintendent the names and ages of the children of all the workmen. Then in the neighboring town we bought for each child a suit, a book, and a toy. For weeks Mrs. Cuttle and I were busy selecting gifts and wrapping up the parcels which on Christmas Day were placed beneath an enormous tree in the center of the coach-house. Here under the eyes of Mrs. Cuttle and her friends the hundred or more small beneficiaries, many of whom had trudged miles over the mountains to claim their rich store of holiday bounty, enjoyed their Christmas cheer.

Into these preparations Mrs. Cuttle always put the same abounding energy which she devoted to her great entertainments—a fact proving that it was not destination, but motion, which

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

Mrs. Cuttle sought, and that in any domain of life she would have risen to eminence. Now in later years, however, it seemed to me that she gave to this work a more vitalizing sympathy with the objects.

Her later years swept her, too, toward a greater interest in the church. One Sunday morning, however, found her rebellious.

"I don't see why I should go to church," said she, sitting in the living-room of her house at The Torrents. "I have nothing to be thankful for."

"Oh, don't say that, Sadie," spoke the big man from the chair. "I feel that I have a great deal to be thankful for."

"What?" asked his wife, petulantly.

"Well, for one thing," replied he, "I have you, and I feel that I have you more than for many years."

And this was so. True, Mrs. Cuttle continued to be known for her magnificent entertainments, but one felt that in these was reflected the attitude of the great English dandy whom I have quoted, and that, though "dead," she "did not want it known." She went on with the old life merely because she knew no other channels into which she might direct that restless vitality.

## CONFESSIONS OF A SOCIAL SECRETARY

The constant spinning was mechanical—a mere reminiscence of the impulse which had set her into motion.

My experience in the great household tapers into one sharp flame of memory. We are alone in the country place on the Hudson, and evening after evening Mr. and Mrs. Rhinebeck Cuttle sit opposite each other at the cribbage-table. The two great fires burn cozily amid the heavy folds of the crimson draperies. And every now and then the little white dog on Mrs. Cuttle's lap opens his eyes to assure himself that she is there.

“Your play,” says Mrs. Cuttle.

It is thus I like to remember the great society leader—a child who, tired out from her play, has come back home to rest.

THE END



[illegible]



090330

